

## TREE STEWARDS PROGRAM



COLLABORATION FOR CONTINUOUS CARE

July 8, 2009

# Tree Stewards to the Forefront

## Coming together for the trees

Leaders of key non-profit organizations have combined their grassroots resources, talents, and volunteers towards a Barton Springs Tree Stewards Program. Representatives of five Austin-based organizations have joined together and formed an ad hoc workgroup, the Barton Springs Plan Coordinating Committee (BSPCC). These leaders support the Tree Stewards Program, short-term improvement projects at Barton Springs Pool, and the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan.

Initiating the Barton Springs Tree Stewards Program is a significant milestone toward creating a more nurturing environment for the trees at Barton Springs Pool. The creation of a Barton Springs Tree Stewards Program includes immediate action and a long-term collaboration through which we can watch over and care for the trees.

Members of the BSPCC have identified the elements of the Barton Springs Tree Stewards Program and have begun:

- Collaborating with the city and volunteers on tree treatments, pruning, and mulching.
- Identifying trees that are available for a comprehensive re-planting program through donations.
- Fund raising through the Austin Parks Foundation with contributions being placed in a special Barton Springs Tree Fund.
- Recruiting volunteers towards a new stewardship in support of grounds, pool, and tree care.
- Advocating for improved landscaping and grounds management that optimizes tree health.

## The tree stewards program

The BSPCC will undertake extensive efforts to promote a new public and private stewardship that focuses on Barton Springs trees. Carrying out each of the components of this program requires the voluntary commitment of member organizations in the BSPCC. The short term goal is to channel citizen and organization concerns over tree neglect and its consequences into positive and sustained actions that will yield long-lasting and visible benefits to the trees and the aesthetic enjoyment of visitors at Barton Springs. Organizations like FBSP have stepped up recruitment efforts to find volunteer stewards.

### *Coordination with City of Austin PARD*

TreeFolks and Austin Parks Foundation will be working with PARD in July, likely through an assigned forester who defines the elements of the plan overall. This effort is aimed to produce a scope of work with assignments among staff and volunteers. Specific line items may include:

1. Trees needing pruning;
2. Trees needing root zone treatments;
3. Trees needing site modifications;
4. Trees needing access restrictions;
5. Defining tree planting areas and schedule
6. Determining sequence of pruning, and treatments, and best timing for organizational involvement
7. Determine the time frame for planned expenditures
8. Development of cost estimates
9. Setting city and APF cost sharing for the project

All project work is coordinated with the parks operations staff and, depending on the size of the project, with the parks dept planning team. Volunteers can assist the city's Parks Forestry Team in many tree care activities like root invigoration of trees.

#### *Tree Treatments*

PARD is expected to solicit bids and qualifications to hire an independent and locally-based arborist to manage the tree treatment efforts. Under the guidance of PARD and contracted professionals, funds can be used for specialized root zone treatments, feeding, specialized care, and the similar beneficial efforts.

The following steps will be coordinated between the BSPCC and PARD experts and will be implemented this Summer and Fall:

1. Get instructions and guidance from PARD staff on tree treatment tasks that volunteers can implement and what tasks will require professional qualifications.
2. Divide work responsibilities between PARD and the BSPCC members.
3. Identify equipment and material needs and purchase mulch, fertilizer and tools.
4. Find willing professionals with credentials acceptable to PARD and the BSPCC who can oversee and implement specialized tasks relating to tree treatments.
5. Trees volunteers will begin treatment efforts (like mulching) that are safe for the lay public.
6. Set a schedule for volunteer work days beginning in late Summer.
7. By July 31st, have all organizations in the BSPCC begin informing their membership via email and the general public via their websites about planned work days.

8. Initiate tree treatments.

### *New Tree Plantings*

Already, organizations and businesses have made commitments for replacement trees for the pool. Walmart will donate large, mature-sized trees that can be transferred from Central Texas properties to the pool. Apache Foundation, an organization dedicated to planting millions of trees in Texas, will donate approximately 100 large caliper and 200 smaller caliper nursery sized trees for the pool. Additional funds received through the APF and TreeFolks are available if additional trees need to be purchased for this project. Organizations of the BSPCC recommend that its members and members of the general public interact with PARD to select locations for donated tree plantings. In October, 2009, volunteers will be mobilized to assist PARD staff on one or more planting days at Barton Springs Pool.

### *Fund Raising*

APF originally pledged \$100,000 by a foundation board vote, for the funding of new tree plantings, but will also help fund current tree care too. APF has also raised about \$3,000 in individual donations that can be used for tree care or planting. Further, on June 15th, APF received a \$50,000 grant from the Stillwater Foundation for Tree Care at Barton Springs as well as other central parks that have similar tree care issues. At least \$10,000 of the grant funds is pledged for Barton Springs. That totals \$113,000 for tree planting and tree care.

APF does condition donation of \$100,000 on city use of all remaining funds for Barton Springs Pool short term projects (just under \$200,000) for hiring a professional arborist and for tree care, treatments, and planting. If the city cuts the PARD forestry budget, APF will cut their pledge by an equal amount.

The BSPCC will publicize the need for public donations to the Barton Springs Tree Fund at the APF website at [austinparks.org](http://austinparks.org); and establish hyperlinks to APF on each organization's website. APF will help with additional fund raising. APF can set up separate accounts for specific park improvement projects or focus under the current effort. APF currently helps over 45 adopt-a-park groups (usually community groups that raise funds) holding funds in trust and reimbursing groups for park improvement expenses. PARD is also developing a website that will further publicize the ability of the public to donate to the APF or directly to the City.

### *Landscaping and Grounds Management*

Many of the existing trees forming the canopy over the Barton Springs pool area have had their root zones paved over, choked over with turf grass, and buried with fill soil and flower planters above the previous ground surface grade. Visitors have trampled under trees, making the soil too compact. We now find ourselves with beautiful trees that cannot get enough air and nutrients to their root systems. The BSPCC will work with the city to advocate for landscaping designs and practices that will change these neglectful ways, while preserving public access and pool enjoyment.

The BSPCC supports open dialogue among the community and organizations and the city staff to achieve consensus-based landscaping changes. On June 29<sup>th</sup>, a landscape architect with PARD announced the city's intention to consider landscaping and grounds changes that would further tree protection. Additionally, the BSPCC offers volunteer resources to assist in landscaping plan implementation and longer term maintenance, to complement limited city resources. The community as a whole should be able to rally around beautiful, natural, and feasible landscaping changes with enlightened support. Alternatives should be considered tree by tree and grove by grove, for optimal tree health. The alternatives that BSPCC thinks worthy of consideration include restoring the original pool entrance between the bath house dressing rooms, removing sidewalk concrete and hardpack, building some raised boardwalks in critical area, removing some raised beds and planters, and adding and removing soil to restore the natural ground surface grade. To optimize tree recovery following treatments, it may be necessary to restrict or dissuade some visitor traffic under some trees.

For the on-going maintenance of trees and for long term health, the BSPCC supports revising lawn and grounds keeping practices to focus more on the trees. In areas under trees, safer mowing practices are needed to protect the tree collar and exposed roots. Alternate native grasses that grow in bunches may improve tree health compared to the typical carpet grasses that choke the tree roots under the turf. Fertilizer and pest management should be managed in a regime that focuses on the needs for tree health and growth, not only what happens to be good for turf.



## The future of Barton Springs Trees

Through volunteer advocacy, the city has received a wake up call for action to address tree health at Barton Springs Pool. With a lot of planning and coordination, there has now emerged a consensus on the handful of trees that will need to go and a strong acknowledgement of the next three steps: to conduct tree treatment this Summer, to plant trees in early Autumn, and to develop a long-term landscaping and grounds plan for the pool.

It will be important to bear in mind that the few dozen trees that were marked as problems are just a small contingent of the dozen score trees at Barton Springs that need care. Only through a comprehen-

sive effort that cares for all the trees can we avoid another crisis in the not so distant future. Through the combined, positive energy of the City of Austin and volunteer organizations, we will restore, revitalize, and renew our urban forest canopy at Barton Springs Pool.

## Committee Members

**Robin Cravey, president; Friends of Barton Springs Pool (chairman)**

**Andrea Rado, director of community relations; Hill Country Conservancy**

**Charlie McCabe, executive director; Austin Parks Foundation**

**Gary Beyer, vice president; Friends of Barton Springs Pool**

**Jon Beall, president; Save Barton Creek Association**

**Mary Ann Neely, president; TreeFolks**

**Ralph Webster, board member; Austin Parks Foundation**

**Scott Harris, executive director; TreeFolks**

**Tom Weber, advocacy chair; Friends of Barton Springs Pool**