

# Pease Park Conservancy

## Strategy Roadmap

February 2023

## Executive Summary

# Pease Park Conservancy EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pease Park Conservancy (PPC) entered its 2022-2023 strategy development process having recently had incredible success in funding and executing a major renovation to a signature area of Pease Park – Kingsbury Commons. PPC sought to establish a clear path forward in its work, building off of its achievements and lessons learned. The development of Kingsbury Commons marked a milestone achievement in the implementation of an ambitious thirty-year Vision Plan developed in 2014 with the input of Pease Park Conservancy's legal predecessor – Trees for Pease – and largely driven by the City's Parks and Recreation Department. With Pease Park Conservancy having developed significantly as an organization since the original Vision Plan, and with changes in the Austin community, PPC began to expand its strategic thinking beyond the bounds of the 2014 Vision Plan.

By exploring how PPC's current role as a leader and innovator in its approach to conservancy, and responding to changing community demands, PPC developed a unified board and staff vision for which audiences it will actively seek to serve and how it will operate within the community.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

### STRATEGY 1

In partnership with the City of Austin, PPC continues to steward the park as a respite and gathering place for all of Austin with a focus on pursuing initiatives and investments that support historically underserved Austinites.

### STRATEGY 2

Accounting for resources and community needs, PPC will pursue initiatives using criteria set forth in the Strategy Screen, consistent with the Vision Plan's guidance.



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## Background

Pease Park Conservancy was founded in 2008 as Trees for Pease to help address the decline of 84-acre Pease Park due to significant Austin City Parks and Recreation Department budget cuts. Over the years, Trees for Pease raised funds for significant maintenance efforts for the district park and incorporated into the nonprofit entity Pease Park Conservancy. In 2013, the City of Austin guided the organization in development of a plan (Vision Plan, adopted in 2014) to prevent development in the green space, sustain maintenance efforts, and greatly enhance the amenities of the park.

Phase One of the Vision Plan focused on renovation of Kingsbury Commons, the park's main activity area. This phase was completed and is considered a great success, having launched Pease Park as a major Austin attraction. The Vision Plan continues to serve as a guiding document for the organization, and the organization is currently embarking on Phase Two of the Plan. Pease Park Conservancy also undertook development of a 2020 Interpretive Plan to determine the central narratives of the park and lay out a plan for presenting those narratives.

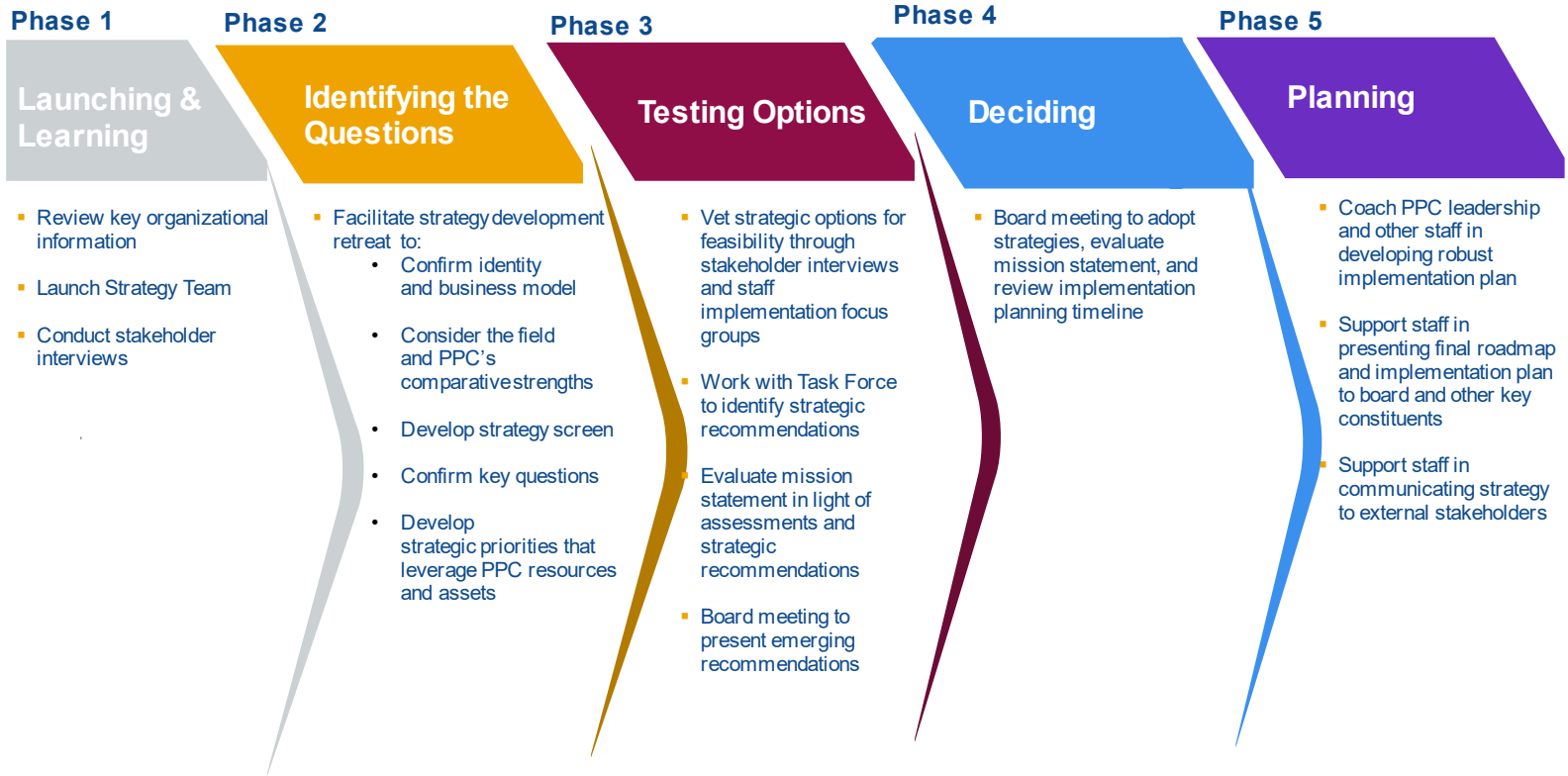
With robust plans in place for park development and programming, the organization at first sought guidance in determining its strategies within the framework of adhering to the 2014 Vision Plan. As PPC began to explore its competing interests and priorities and questioning its assumptions regarding its obligations to the City, PPC began to reframe the strategy development process in terms of determining the extent to which the Vision Plan should continue to guide the organization and whom PPC should be serving.

## Process

Beginning in April of 2022, La Piana Consulting (La Piana) guided Pease Park Conservancy in a thoughtful review of its current operations, including an initial assessment (see *Appendix A*), development of an Identity Statement (see *Appendix B*), and consideration of its potential future growth. Working closely with a strategy team comprised of both Pease Park Conservancy board members and staff, La Piana developed a plan for assessing the organization's strengths and challenges, as well as what opportunities the organization faces.

La Piana reviewed client data and interviewed board members, staff, and partners as part of its assessment. Through the assessment La Piana identified key themes and challenges that helped inform an in-person strategy development retreat with Pease Park Conservancy board members and staff. At the September 2022 retreat, participants identified the most pressing strategic questions Pease Park Conservancy is facing. With these questions as a guide to formulating possible strategic options, La Piana then continued to work with the strategy team and staff to vet options and gather all information that the Pease Park Conservancy board would need to decide between strategic options. On February 15, 2023, the Pease Park Conservancy board met to adopt its new strategies. La Piana then supported the staff in developing an implementation plan in line with adopted strategies. The following report memorializes the findings and decisions that resulted from the strategy development process.

April 2022- February 2023



## Strategic Questions

As Pease Park Conservancy began developing a strategy for future growth and operations, the organization considered framing its vision around several defining questions. Each question presented its own series of potential strategic options. Pease Park Conservancy developed and refined these questions and potential options over a series of facilitated conversations with board members, staff members, and external stakeholders (see *Appendix C*).

Pease Park Conservancy determined that the most pressing questions for the organization are:

- Who is our community? Who do we serve?
- What should our role be in serving the community?

## Strategic Priorities

Informed by staff input and the input of partners and donors (see *Appendix D*), the board adopted the following strategies:

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## Strategy One

In partnership with the City of Austin, PPC continues to steward the park as a respite and gathering place for all of Austin with a focus on pursuing initiatives and investments that support historically underserved Austinites.

### Other Options

- *A. We define our community as the neighbors of the park. This group would include residential neighbors, the University of Texas, developers adjacent to the park, and small businesses located near the park. PPC could accommodate the needs of those partners that directly surround the park and determine its primary audience to be the individuals and organizations located within a two-mile radius of the park perimeter, in keeping with the definition of a district park.*
- *B. Our central audience – who we serve – is the City of Austin, Parks and Recreation Department, Parks and Recreation Department Board, and the City Council. We will prioritize activities based on what we know will have the support of those entities for the foreseeable future, knowing that this will vary over short cycles of time, especially given elections.*
- *C. Our community is comprised of our current partners. We look to conservancy partners and programming partners (including arts organizations and educational partners) to determine what our priorities should be.*
- *D. Our audience is the public at large, and we will prioritize events that draw large numbers of visitors and tourists through partnerships with festivals, major events, and chambers of commerce.*

### Rationale

Prioritizing the historically underserved of Austin is most in alignment with PPC's values as an organization. This strategy is also responsive to the fact that PPC's current major funders and a variety of prospective funders are increasingly concentrating their funding on initiatives that help address inequities. Also, the City increasingly is calling upon PPC to be responsive to the needs of the Austin community at large. In prioritizing the historically underserved, PPC will continue to maintain an attractive park that is an asset to the immediately surrounding community and an attraction for all of Austin.

## Strategy Two

Accounting for resources and community needs, PPC will pursue initiatives using criteria set forth in the Strategy Screen, consistent with the Vision Plan's guidance.

### Other Options

- *A. Our role should be merely to protect the park – from natural deterioration, from City encroachment, from developers, and from public overuse. We should focus on maintaining the natural environment and only program or expand current operations as required by the City.*

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- B. The original Vision Plan provides the correct scope for what our efforts should entail over the coming years, but we should implement activities and phases of the Vision Plan based on their relationship to current and anticipated resources.*
  - C. We are committed to the full, original Vision Plan and must proceed as it was originally developed in terms of both scope and sequencing over the next 20-30 years.*
  - D. We should seek partnerships to execute the Vision Plan and expand scope beyond our 84-acres.*
  - E. We should carry out the Vision Plan and address community needs not originally contemplated in the 2014 plan.*

## Rationale

All stakeholders engaged in this process indicated they have come to rely upon Pease Park as not only a protected green space but as a community gathering place, an identity that further reinforces that PPC has grown beyond the founding vision of the organization. The Vision Plan, the result of a robust process undertaken with the best information that the City and Trees for Pease had at the time of its development, has served as a catalyst for PPC expanding its role as a community convenor and as the steward of one of Austin's most valued treasures. Having achieved great success in implementing the plan, PPC is now positioned to evaluate how it can build off of its established expertise to reconsider how best to proceed in its operations. Guided but not bound by the Vision Plan, PPC will now set out to consider the various elements of the Vision Plan, considering how the plan should be modified to best address current opportunities, challenges, and community needs.

## Differentiating Strengths

At the September 2022 retreat, Pease Park Conservancy identified a number of key differentiating strengths that the organization can leverage to carry out its adopted strategies. These varied strengths largely focused on PPC's ability to deliver high quality experience to its multitude of visitors.

- Personal operational presence
- Clean restrooms (a reflection of operational excellence)
- Design excellence
- Commitment to quality
- Imagination and effort (as reflected in part in being award winning)
- High number of visitors
- Both a destination and a valued community park for immediate neighbors
- Park extends to a diverse array of neighborhoods
- Location
- Adaptable and *willing* to adapt
- Collaborative
- City-approved plan

PPC's commitment to excellence, coupled with its established identity as a valued community asset, along with its ability to adapt and engage partners effectively, will support PPC as it seeks to increase the diversity of its audience and move beyond its previous Vision Plan to a framework that is responsive to opportunities and community needs.

## Impact

Pursuing its chosen strategies will also further the impact that Pease Park Conservancy has seen and wishes to continue to see. At the Strategy Retreat, PPC board and staff members identified key areas of impact they wish for PPC to achieve. These largely fell into the categories of natural preservation, positive user experience, and leadership in its model of conservation.

- Conservation
- Habitat for animals
- Improved well being
- Individual connection to nature
- An intimate, welcoming space
- Increased park and city safety
- Increased accessibility of the park
- Space and opportunity for cultural exchange and sharing historical context
- Heightened collaboration
- Model for public/private partnership and for how conservancy is done
- Model for innovation and risk taking
- Opportunity for volunteer engagement resulting in volunteer investment in park
  - Accelerator for other efforts

PPC's decision to more clearly identify its primary audience and to determine its role in operations and the community will help guide it towards maintaining a well-protected green space that serves the Austin community, while also furthering PPC's community role and reputation as a leader.

## Applying the Strategy Screen

During the September 2022 retreat, Pease Park Conservancy identified decision-making criteria, or a "Strategy Screen," to evaluate potential strategic options (see *Appendix E*). The strategies that the Pease Park Conservancy board adopted met all the criteria developed during the retreat.

**Strategy 1:** In partnership with the City of Austin, PPC continues to steward the park as a respite and gathering place for all of Austin with a focus on pursuing initiatives and investments that support historically underserved Austinites.



Strategy Screen Criterion	Evaluating the Strategy
Does the strategy advance equity internally and externally?	This strategy puts equity at the forefront by prioritizing Austin's historically underserved populations.
Does it further our mission?	This strategy embraces the mission statement's call for maintaining a "public green space for the sustainable use and enjoyment of all."
Does it leverage or sustain our competitive advantage?	This leverages PPC's differentiating strength as a community leader and collaborator.
Is it sustainable?	Focusing on underserved Austinites increases the number of donors from which PPC can seek funds.
Is it implementable within a reasonable timeframe?	PPC has already made some significant partnerships to allow it to pursue this work.
Is this best taken on by us, or should someone else do it?	As the sole nonprofit stewards of a unique Austin asset, PPC is best positioned to carry out this strategy.
Do the benefits outweigh the costs?	This strategy maximizes benefit to the Austin community, with specific attention to those individuals who have most to gain in enjoying the park. It also affords heightened opportunity for fundraising.
Will it not negatively impact our ability to care for the park and its surrounding areas?	This strategy centers maintenance of the park.
Does it put the needs of the community overall over individual interests and not harm any community members?	This strategy inherently takes into account the needs of all Austinites over individual needs.
Does it positively impact our role as a collaborator?	This strategy will rely on continued collaboration and the purposeful building of new partnerships.
Will Parks and Recreation Department and the City allow this?	Both PARD and the City Council member we spoke to support this strategy.

**Strategy 2:** Accounting for resources and community needs, PPC will pursue initiatives using criteria set forth in the Strategy Screen, consistent with the Vision Plan's guidance.

This strategy integrates the Strategy Screen into its guidance. It is therefore compatible with the Strategy Screen, but the evaluation below provides further consideration of how the elements of the Strategy Screen are impacted by the strategy.

Strategy Screen Criterion	Evaluating the Strategy
Does the strategy advance equity internally and externally?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Does it further our mission?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.

Does it leverage or sustain our competitive advantage?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Is it sustainable?	This strategy expressly integrates sustainability into its considerations.
Is it implementable within a reasonable timeframe?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Is this best taken on by us, or should someone else do it?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Do the benefits outweigh the costs?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Will it not negatively impact our ability to care for the park and its surrounding areas?	Pursuit and/or deviation from the Vision Plan guidance's will be determined by consistency with the Strategy Screen.
Does it put the needs of the community overall over individual interests and not harm any community members?	This strategy includes assessment of community need.
Does it positively impact our role as a collaborator?	This strategy will provide new opportunities for collaboration in both the assessment and addressing of community need.
Will Parks and Recreation Department and the City allow this?	Both PARD and the City Council member we spoke to support this strategy.

## Mission and Vision Statements

The Strategy Team reviewed the organization's mission and vision statements to determine if information gathered during the strategy development process indicated that either should be revised, particularly in light of the final adopted strategies. The Strategy Team determined that the strategies align with the current mission statement. The Strategy Team also determined that the strategies aligned with the vision statement, but that the use of "respite" in Strategy 1 highlights a key use for the park that was not reflected within the original vision statement. The Strategy Team revised the original statement to use language that was more inclusive of all the ways that visitors use the park.

PPC revised the original vision statement from:

*Pease Park will be known as an accessible urban green space for play, adventure, and connectivity, where land stewardship, environmental innovation and inclusive programming embrace the community's history and inspire its future.*

to this revised language:

*Pease Park will be known as an accessible urban green space for all, where land stewardship, environmental innovation and inclusive programming embrace the community's history and inspire its future.*