



Proposed Ordinance Updates for Special Events at City Parks

Austin Arts, Culture, Music and Entertainment | Austin Parks and Recreation

Council postponed update on May 7, 2026 (CM Ellis Motion) → Stakeholder Sessions → Committee Briefing on July 15
→ City Council vote on July 23



Background – How We Got Here

Ordinance Update Timeline

-  **2015** Parkland Events Task Force (PETF) was created by Resolution 20150305-025
-  **2017** PETF Report adopted; Chapter 8-1 (Parks Administration) event day limits were added to the code
-  **2018** Chapter 4-20 (Special Events) adopted; Austin Center for Events established for centralized event permitting
-  **2022** Chapter 4-20 amended: Tier 2 definitions updated
-  **2025** Creation of Austin Arts, Culture, Music and Entertainment (ACME)
-  **May 7, 2026** Draft ordinance moving parks special events from Chapter 8-1 (Parks Admin) to Chapter 4-20 (Special Events)
-  **June 16-17** Stakeholder Information Sessions – June 16, 12 pm, Virtual; June 17, 5 pm, In-Person
-  **July 15** ACME to present to the Climate, Water, Environment and Parks Committee
-  **July 23** Updated draft ordinance reflecting stakeholder and committee feedback returns to City Council

Direction to Staff from May 7 City Council Meeting

1. Issue an open invitation to current and potential organizers of large-scale special events in public recreation areas to meet to discuss the proposed ordinance, answer questions, and take feedback; send direct invitations to all park partners and event organizers listed in the draft ordinance;
2. Following these stakeholder meetings, provide a briefing to the Council Climate, Water, Environment, and Parks Committee at its July 15, 2026, meeting, or whenever the Committee's July meeting may be scheduled, on the draft ordinance and stakeholder feedback;
3. Return to full Council at the July 23, 2026, meeting with a draft ordinance that reflects stakeholder and committee feedback as appropriate; and
4. Proceed with Austin Parks and Recreation issuing the Request For Applications (RFA) for the existing unassigned Auditorium Shores dates immediately.

1 Stakeholder Input Collected feedback from two sessions	2 CWEP Committee Presenting on July 15	3 Return to Council Returning on July 23	4 RFA Process Posted, May 22 / Closed, June 11 Scored, June 12 Notifications Sent, June 26
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Problem Being Solved

Code adjustments are necessary to better reflect current roles and responsibilities for facilitating Parks Special Events. There will be no fiscal impact:

Where are event day limits today?

Chapter 8-1-15 (Parks Administration – Limits in Special Events), this section was formerly administered by APR.

Who administers special events?

ACME administers Chapter 4-20 **but is not the enforcement authority over Chapter 8-1.**

What's the risk of leaving the ordinance as is?

Inconsistent enforcement, public confusion, and administrative gaps about which department oversees event day limits at:

- Zilker Metropolitan Park
- Festival Beach at Edward Rendon Senior Metropolitan Park
- Auditorium and Vic Mathias Shores at Lady Bird Lake Metropolitan Park



Key Updates Shared with Stakeholders

What's Moving to Chapter 4-20 / Ordinance Update

↔ Event Day Limits

- Repeals section §8-1-15 and creates new section §4-20-28
- Event day caps for Zilker (24/yr), Festival Beach (17/yr), and Auditorium/Vic Mathias Shores (17/yr) move to the Special Events chapter administered by ACME

➔ Event Day Transfers

An event organizer may **not** transfer special event days to another organizer or event unless they follow requirements adopted by administrative rule. These requirements protect existing organizers' days and prevents unauthorized reassignment of calendar slots.

🏢 Non-Reoccurring Events at Auditorium Shores / Vic Mathias

In addition to the 17-day annual limit, the City Manager may authorize multi-day non-reoccurring events for a municipal purpose, up to a total of 25 days per calendar year according to 6 factors: (1) scheduling conflicts, (2) traffic, (3) park damage, (4) public health/safety, (5) city resources, and (6) availability of other venues

★ Updated Definitions

- New definition for "Public Recreation Area"
- Updated definition for "City Facility" to reflect "Public Recreation Area" rather than "Parkland"
- Updated definition for "Legacy Event" to include reoccurring events allowed in Chapter 4-20

🌲 Updated Official Event Rosters

- Removes events no longer operating
- Adds Texas Wellness Day to Festival Beach
- Updates Dragon Boat Festival & Races at Festival Beach to single day
- Updates event names to Trail of Lights Run, Austin City Limits (ACL) Festival, Capitol 10,000 (Cap 10k), Austin Food + Wine Festival, Austin's New Year, South By Southwest (SXSW), Texas Vegfest, Texas Craft Brewers Festival, Head of the Colorado Regatta

What's Not Changing in Move

- Annual event day caps remain the same: Zilker (24), Festival Beach (17), Auditorium/Vic Mathias (17)
- APR continues to manage Park-Only events, as well as picnic site and shelter site reservations
- ACE remains the permitting authority for events defined by Chapter 4-20. Setup/teardown days do not count towards the annual limit

📅 New Events — Competitive Process

§4-20-28(E)(3): Once days at a site fall below the annual cap, when a listed event stops operating, the City Manager **may** establish a competitive application process. New events selected this way count toward the annual cap and can earn Legacy Event status after two-year probationary period of consistent operation and successful matrix scoring.

Ordinance Update for 7/23 Council Meeting — What's Changing

Topic	Draft V2 (5/7/2026 Council Meeting)	Proposed Updates / Next Steps	Why It Matters
Auditorium / Vic Mathias Shores flex days	Updated allowable event days of non-reoccurring events approved by City Manager from single-day to multi-day	Maintains multi-day non-reoccurring events allowed.	Gives City Manager more flexibility for municipal purposes (e.g., special one-time events).
Event Names in §4-20-28 (D) lists	Updated event rosters with correct reoccurring event names	Adding adjustment to Dragon Boat Race as a single-day event rather than a two-day event, which was previously requested by the event organizer.	Aligns legal text with how events are currently operating.
Private vs Public events on APR property	N/A	Confirm roles and responsibilities for private events managed by APR and public events managed by ACME/ACE.	Recommended by APR — process allows for ACE to review all public events for awareness and to determine if an ACE application is required.
Alternate locations and incentives	N/A	Explore alternate locations for large events and incentives for organizers to utilize instead of downtown locations.	Locations and viable incentives must be identified to steer large events away from the downtown area to stabilize usage of Zilker and Auditorium Shores.
Alignment with existing managing partner contracts	N/A	Review all existing partnership contracts and identify areas of overlap. Create a clear roadmap for partners and ACME to navigate future growth.	Managing Partners with longstanding City contracts want assurances that options defined in their contracts will be honored by ACME and the City.

Questions & Answers from Public Stakeholder Sessions

Q: Can we remove event day limits at Auditorium Shores?

A: This can be considered. With current event days, turf mitigation requirements, and avoidance of partner events (The Long Center, Palmer Events Center, The Trail Conservancy), the event day limits would naturally be limited.

Q: What ways can the city provide incentives to organizers to host events at alternate locations from downtown?

A: This is an important question that will be explored by ACME and APR, including identifying alternate locations and incentives for event organizers.

Q: What other items should be addressed with the current code update to make things easier between APR and ACME?

A: APR recommended a code update to move public events under Chapter 4-20 while private events remain under Chapter 8.

Q: Does this change alter Park rules and lake rules to stay in Chapter 8?

A: No park rules are being altered by these requested amendments other than those identified here.

Q: The Trail Conservancy requests that ACME acknowledge that there will be no changes to their established POMA and their right to exercise all aspects of phase 3, should they choose to do so.

A: ACME will explore the long-term effects of code and administrative policy changes upon existing contracts with private/public partners and develop a clear understanding, for both the city and the public, of established trajectories by all partner agreements.

Q: Austin Parks Foundation asked for clarification on events such as Movies in the Park. Would they not need an ACE application?

A: Historically, Austin Parks Foundation events have not required a special events permit as “park only events”. To alleviate any confusion between the possible types of events at parks, ACME and APR Staff will coordinate and share descriptions of event types on the ACME website.

Next Steps

- **July 15 – ACME presents the Special Events Ordinance Update to the Climate, Water, Environment, and Parks Committee**
- **July 23 – ACME brings the Request for Council Action (RCA) for the Special Events Ordinance Update back to City Council for consideration**

Thank You!



 Feedback All community questions and comments were documented and shared with ACME and APR leadership and City Council.	 ACME Park Special Events ParkSpecialEvents@austintexas.gov Event and Sales Manager: Josh Jacobs Josh.Jacobs@austintexas.gov	 Austin Center for Events SpecialEvents@austintexas.gov 512-974-1000 Office of Special Events Manager: Maria Alonso Maria.Alonso@austintexas.gov	 Public Hearing July 23 Sign up for public comment at the July 23 City Council meeting. Visit austintexas.gov or call 512-974-2250.
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