

CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN / SAN PEDRO SPRINGS PARK

San Antonio, Texas

As one of the two oldest tracts of dedicated park land in the United States, San Pedro Springs Park represents both a cultural resource and a central element in the history of San Antonio. The springs were discovered and named by Spanish missionaries in 1709. The park site is the original "Villa de Bejar", the village being subsequently relocated to the banks of the San Antonio River (site of the Alamo) in 1722. In 1729, the 46 acre block of land, with the springs at its center, was dedicated as public open space by the King of Spain.

The history of San Pedro Springs Park is as colorful and varied as the history of San Antonio. The land has served as ritual Indian ground, military base for the U.S. Army, Confederate prison camp during the Civil War, and a major tourist attraction and spa from the 1860's to the turn of the century. At one time or another, the park has contained elements as diverse as private and public zoo facilities, horse racing track, dance hall and beer garden, museums and many other active and passive recreation facilities and other amusements.

In 1922, the central lake (created by the outflow from the springs) was improved and became a municipal swimming facility. In 1929 two important building structures, the City's first branch library and the San Pedro Playhouse, were erected. In the late 1940's, the lake was closed due to inadequate spring flows; in 1954, a new municipal swimming pool was built within a portion of the lake bed. Also in 1954, the McFarlin tennis center was built; this facility now contains 22 public tennis courts and support functions.

Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, the overall condition of San Pedro Springs Park began to slowly deteriorate. In its current condition, almost half of the park's land is absorbed with building, parking and other paved construction. The edges of the park have become unsightly, with parking, building structures, overhead utilities, and signs blocking the primary views. The central water feature of the park has fallen into disrepair and, except for 10 weeks during the summer when the swimming pool is in use, the former lake bed is a concrete "pit" surrounded by a chain link fence. Additionally, expansion of swimming pool facilities, tennis and baseball fields have further constricted the grounds.

In 1992, a Master Plan for revitalization of the park was commissioned. The conceptual Master Plan strives to restore the principal historic elements of the park, while respecting the contemporary functions for which the land is now used. The Master Plan design seeks to:

- restore San Pedro Springs and Lake as a central water element
- redefine the formal edges of the park
- establish major pedestrian and vehicular entries and circulation patterns
- reorganize, restore and repair building and site developments to open vistas and soften transitions from constructed elements to natural elements
- maximize green space

Because San Pedro Springs and Lake have been both the literal and figurative center of the park throughout its history, reclaiming these components is central to the master plan concept. The restoration and preservation of these features will return a year-round focal point to the park's design.

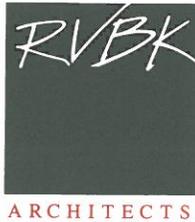
The park's edges will be enhanced by burying perimeter utilities, developing consistent pedestrian walkways, fencing systems and appropriate lighting. Three large open "greens" have been created for passive recreation activities as well as to open primary vistas into the park. Parking lots have been rearranged for better efficiency and access to those structures in the park requiring vehicular access. Almost one acre of paving has been deleted in the new design, while maintaining the same quantity of parking.

The large tennis center, dominating the northeast quadrant of the park, has been reorganized to improve internal function and to better interface with the green space of the park. The tennis pro shop is redesigned and expanded to open to the park and become a central retail/dining feature.

A series of walkways delineating both the formal pedestrian axes and secondary pedestrian routes has been created, and a jogging/walking trail has been developed to connect many of the points of historical interest. New family-oriented recreation facilities, including playground equipment and picnic facilities, have also been planned.

An integrated system of landscaping, emphasizing the existing mature vegetation but adding new elements where necessary, has been designed to be the central organizing element connecting the various active and passive activities contained within the park.

In total, the Master Plan envisions a revitalized San Pedro Springs Park which not only serves the community's recreational needs but also reclaims an important historical resource.



SAN PEDRO SPRINGS PARK
HISTORIC CHRONOLOGY

- 1709 San Pedro Springs are named
- 1718 Area is selected for the "villa de Bejar" and the Mission San Antonio de Valero
- 1722 Villa & Mission are moved to the banks of the San Antonio River and the Camino Real moves with them
- 1729 King Philip V of Spain makes a royal grant of the area for public land
- 1738 San Pedro Acequia is in place
- 1845 Area is used for the first military base in Texas
- 1852 Official dedication of the park
- 1860's Civil War POW camp
- 1864 J.J. Duerler enters into a 20 year lease for exclusive operation of park concessions and the following amenities are added:
- Ponds stocked with fish and tropical plants
 - Bridge across the lake
 - Race Course
 - Zoo
 - Flower Garden
 - Museum, Exhibition Building
 - Ballroom and Bar
- 1870 Rainwater passage is constructed
- 1874 Mule-drawn carriages bring visitors to the park
- 1875 Alazan Acequia is built
- 1880's Grotto is built to function as a summerhouse
- 1885 Skeletons are discovered in large cave
- 1891 City takes control of all city parks and installs electric lights
- 1891 Change in flow of the springs
- 1895 Alazan Acequia is abandoned

- 1899 City authorizes a major improvement program:
• Zoo moves to the west
• Lake is lined with masonry
• Grotto is raised three feet
• Steps installed above the springs
- 1902 Ballpark replaces Race Course
- 1906 San Pedro Acequia ceases to flow
- 1907 Private amusement park opens south of San Pedro Springs Park
- 1912 San Pedro Acequia is abandoned
- 1915 Zoo moves to Brackenridge Park
- 1920 DAR erects the first of 123 markers tracing the original route of the Camino Real
- 1920's Tennis Courts are constructed
- 1922 Municipal Swimming Pool is constructed in the old lake bed
- 1924 Pioneer Freighters' Association erects marker
- 1929 San Pedro Playhouse is built
- 1929 First branch of the library system opens
- 1930's (WPA) Stone wall is built along Ashby
(WPA) Stone-lined drainage channels are built to collect runoff from North Flores and two springs within the park
- 1940 Swimming Pool closes due to insufficient flow from springs
- 1952 100th anniversary of City Parks System
- 1954 McFarlin Tennis Center is built
- 1954 Present-day Swimming Pool is constructed in the old lake bed
- 1973 Dewey Street and Theater Street are removed from the park
- 1977 Master Plan calls for the brick plaza above the springs to be installed
- 1986 Master Plan by City Parks and Recreation Department
- 1992 San Pedro Creek channel is renovated by SARA.
- 1992 Master Plan by RVBK is underway

In Summary:

1. The springs have always been the historic and aesthetic center of the park.
2. Historic events and points of interest have come and gone throughout the years.
3. Active recreation and various structures have always been a part of the park.