

Rathgeber Natural Resources Park

Planning to Celebrate Nature. Gently.

Draft Public Engagement Plan
October 2023

The future Rathgeber Natural Resource Park is made possible through a donation of 300 acres of land from Dick Rathgeber and Rathgeber Investment Company. This land is located adjacent to the Headwaters Subdivision.

The future Rathgeber Natural Resource Park will not only protect 300 acres of pristine Texas Hill Country and the convergence zones of Barton Creek and Little Barton Creek, but it will provide public access to passively recreate, immerse in nature, and explore the Texas Night Sky.

The land is not currently open to the public. The City of Dripping Springs is formulating a master park plan and will be working with stakeholders, community members, and RVI - a Planning and Landscape Architect - to ensure that Rathgeber Natural Resource Park will be the best in class and offer much to the Dripping Springs community and residents of Hays County.

Public input and engagement will be a key component of the successful planning process for Rathgeber Natural Resource Park.

Public Engagement Guiding Principles

- **Provide meaningful information** to all stakeholders during the process.
- **Engage in two-way communication** with a wide range of stakeholders.
- **Listen to the desires and priorities** of stakeholders.
- **Respond openly and honestly** to all comments.

Key Messages *(to be reviewed and finalized with the City of Dripping Springs)*

- The Rathgeber Natural Resource Park will allow citizens to celebrate and enjoy our natural environment in a gentle way that protects the environment.
- Once open, the park will allow citizens to passively recreate, immerse in nature, and explore the Texas Night Sky.
- The park will protect 300 acres of the pristine Texas Hill Country located adjacent to the Headwaters Subdivision.
- The park is made possible from the generosity of Dick Rathgeber and Rathgeber Investment Company, which donated the land to the City of Dripping Springs, and funding through the Hays County Park & Open Space Bond.

- Planning for the park will be a transparent process and will involve public input on (1) the initial goals and priorities, and (2) preliminary concepts for the park based on public input.
- Information about the project will be available on the City of Dripping Springs website (www.cityofdrippingsprings.com/rathgeber) and at various community events, public meetings and stakeholder workshops.

Public Engagement

To engage the public during the planning process, outreach will focus on two methods:

- Online information about the planning process
- Personal, face-to-face communication

Online Information

Easy, accurate and convenient information will be available to the public throughout the planning process. The focus of this effort will be website information that is timely, accurate, and meaningful. The information will be coordinated with the City of Dripping Springs and available on the city website. This will allow a wide range of stakeholders – at their convenience - to stay informed and engaged during the planning process.

The website will include:

- A general description of the planning process and its history.
- Project schedule.
- How to stay involved and provide input.
- A virtual tour of the property.
- A way to submit a comment online (comments can be forwarded from the city to RVI team member Randall Dillard at randall@nancyledbetter.com)

All information for the website will be drafted by the RVI Team and submitted to the city's Parks and Community Services Director. If approved, the information will be forwarded to the city's People and Communications Department for consideration to post on the website.

If approved by the city, the initial planning information will be posted on the website in October.

Website Development Guiding Principles

- Adhere to all City of Dripping Springs website guidelines.
- The project page will be updated often to provide timely information.
- The website information will highlight opportunities for public input.

Personal, face-to-face communication

This outreach will consist of three main elements:

- Pop-up events
- Public Meetings
- Stakeholder Workshop

Community Events

The RVI Team will work with the Dripping Springs Parks and Community Services Department to select community events for a Rathgeber Natural Resource Park information booth.

The booth will be staffed by RVI Team members to visit face-to-face with people and provide information about the park, answer questions and highlight how the public can provide input in the planning process.

The Rathgeber Natural Resource Park booth will be coordinated by RVI (with oversight by the City of Dripping Springs) and may include:

- A banner for “Rathgeber Natural Resource Park”.
- Colorful pictures of the existing park area (*and possibly a laptop that could show videos of the park’s existing environmental features*).
- A map showing the park location with a QR code or website link to the virtual tour.
- Images of low-touch, environmentally sensitive amenities that **could** be incorporated into Rathgeber Natural Resource Park.
- A display showing the schedule of the planning process.
- Provide a comment card for suggestions or questions.

Face-to-Face Meetings

Two public meetings will be held at two separate steps in the planning process; to gain public input on (1) the initial goals and priorities for the park, and (2) preliminary concepts for the park based on public input.

Notification of Public Meetings

The RVI team will coordinate all notifications (including content and timing) with the City of Dripping Springs. Notifications could include:

- A news release to local newspapers.
- Postcards through Every Door Direct through the U.S. Postal Service that allows postcards to be mailed directly to addresses within zip codes or to certain routes in a zip

code (to be designed, printed and coordinated with USPS by the RVI Team with approval and oversight by the City of Dripping Springs).

- Mailings to representatives of key groups and organizations which will be determined with the city.
- Social media – preferably through the city’s social media accounts.
- Media releases from the City of Dripping Springs.

First Public Meeting

The first public meeting would be during the early stages of the planning process and would be a public introduction of the project. The meeting would:

- Introduce the consultant's project team.
- Present the project approach, parameters, schedule, existing conditions, opportunities, and challenges.
- Seek input on vision planning goals, guiding principles, and further community-focused design activities.
- Facilitate a preliminary PARK (Preserve, Add, Remove, Keep Out) input exercise or similar exercise.
- The meeting will close with information on the next steps.

Second Public Meeting

The second public meeting would be held after the city and RVI staff studied the results of the first meeting and developed preliminary concepts for the park based on public input.

This second public engagement will:

- Present the preliminary design concepts to solicit feedback.
- Generate alternate ideas.
- Demonstrate how public input has influenced the project.

Stakeholder Workshop

This stakeholder workshop would be held prior to the second public meeting. The goal would be to build interest from key stakeholders, how to best address their specific interests and to build trust regarding the activities and amenities at the park. Invitees to this workshop will be determined in consultation and approval with the City of Dripping Springs. Possible invitees could include representatives of:

- Headwaters Neighborhood Association
- Adjacent Property Owners
- Key Business Leaders
- Dripping Springs ISD

- Emergency Services
- Night Sky Enthusiasts
- Bird Watchers
- Hays County Master Naturalists
- Boy and Girl Scouts
- Environmental Groups

This public engagement will

- Recruit members of the community to represent site user groups in a collaborative design workshop.
- Define Site User Groups and pressure test preliminary Project Vision Concept Plans by strengthening our understanding of primary user needs, potential site behaviors, and design ideas for ongoing Vision Plan development.

The stakeholder participants will be developed in consultation with City of Dripping Springs. Stakeholder groups may be staggered throughout the day or combined, depending on need, location, and group.

Meeting Reports

After each of the of face-to-face meetings mentioned above, a brief report will be developed by the RVI Team to list:

- The number of people that signed-in at the meeting.
- A summary of the public comments and how they can be addressed.
- The results of any survey conducted as part of the meeting.
- Displays and presentations at each meeting.
- How meeting notifications were handled.

Tentative Key Dates for Public Engagement Activities *(Schedule is subject to change)*

- November 2023 – Additional website information for Rathgeber Natural Resource Park
- December 2, 2023 – Information booth at Christmas on Mercer in Dripping Springs
- December 14, 2023 – First public meeting to receive public input on the initial goals and priorities for the park
- March 2024 – Invited Stakeholder Workshop
- April 27, 2024 – Information booth at Founder’s Day
- May 2024 – Second public meeting to get public input on preliminary concepts for the park
- June 2024 – Presentation of Vision Plan Report to City of Dripping Springs