

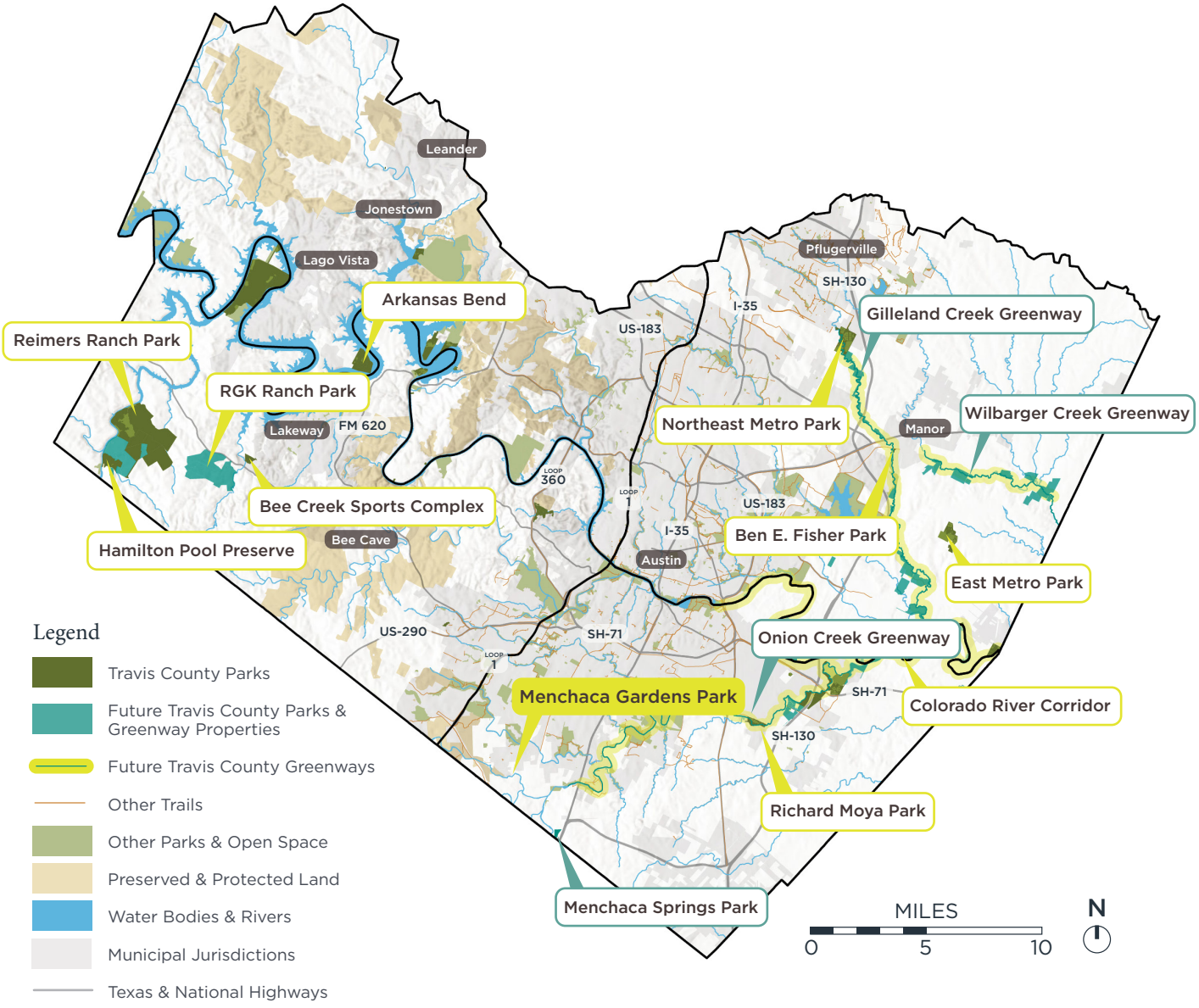
MENCHACA GARDENS
EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

NOVEMBER, 2026

Existing Conditions

Site Context

Menchaca Gardens Park offers an opportunity to provide a much-needed public gathering space in a rapidly growing area.

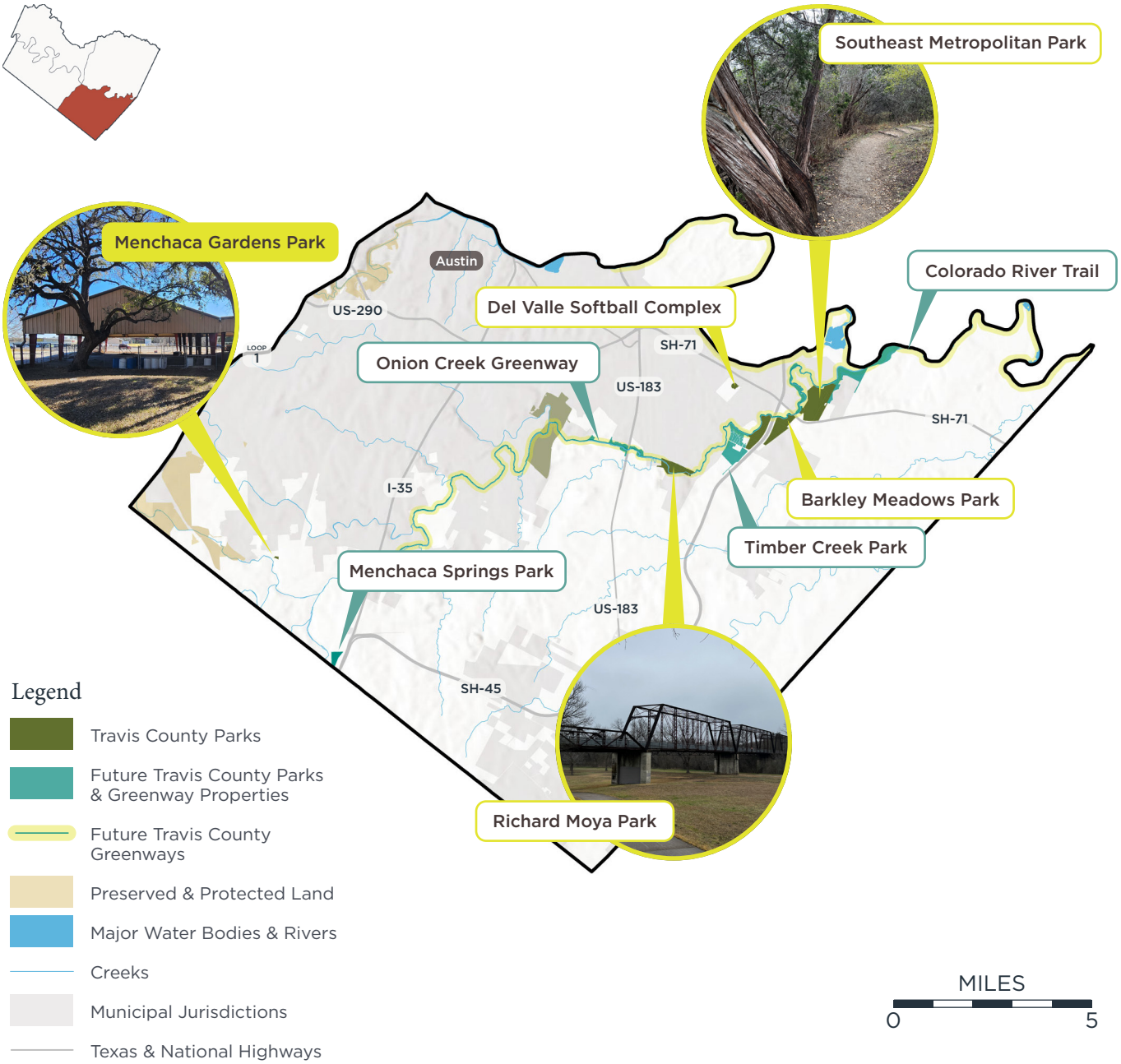


Menchaca Gardens is located within the Southeast Planning Area of the Travis County Parks system, just outside the City of Austin. The Southeast Planning Area contains some of the newest parks in the County system and has the fewest parks of any Travis County planning area. Most parks in the area were acquired in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The park system includes large athletic and recreation facilities, as well as greenway projects that are expanding access to parks and trails across the area.

The Southeast Planning Area currently includes three Community Parks, one Metropolitan Park, and two Greenways that are currently under development. Projects underway include improvements to Southeast Metropolitan Park, Onion Creek Greenway and Trailhead, Timber Creek Park, and Menchaca Springs Park.

Historically rural, the area surrounding Menchaca Gardens has experienced significant residential growth and is transitioning into a more developed suburban landscape. The area is characterized by single-family residential development, with many newer neighborhoods providing small private parks or recreational amenities for residents. At the same time, there is a growing need for public community gathering spaces that are accessible and available to everyone.

FM 1626 is a major transportation corridor through the area, connecting SH 45 to I-35 and carrying significant traffic between growing residential communities and regional destinations. Within this rapidly changing context, Menchaca Gardens provides an opportunity to add a publicly accessible community park and gathering space within an area experiencing continued growth and increasing demand for parks and recreation.



Menchaca Gardens - At A Glance

Menchaca Gardens is a 4-acre site bordered by FM 1626 and adjacent to Menchaca Elementary School, residential neighborhoods, and commercial uses. Located within the Blackland Prairie ecoregion, the site includes mature live oaks, hackberry and cedar elm woodland, and an ephemeral tributary that drains toward Bear Creek. These natural features provide shade, habitat, and opportunities to connect the park to the area's broader ecological systems.

The site also contains a pavilion, outdoor stage, garage, building foundations, former restroom and septic field, and paved driveways. Originally a community fire hall, the site later became home to the Manchaca Fire Hall Kitchen, a neighborhood restaurant that operated until the early 2000s. The pavilion and garage continue to support fire department training, maintaining the site's connection to a long history of public service and community gathering. The following sections further explore the site's character, history, and existing conditions.



Shady upland grove north of the park pavilion



South facing view of park pavilion



Garage used for storage of fire department equipment



Medium sized stage where performances were once held. Colorful mural can be seen on the stage wall

History

Menchaca Gardens' history of public service and community gathering provides a foundation for carrying its stories, structures, and connections into the park's future.

Menchaca Gardens reflects a long history of community gathering, public service, and local identity. The surrounding community takes its name from José Antonio Menchaca (1800–1879), a Tejano army officer who fought in the Texas Revolution, served as mayor pro tem of San Antonio, and helped defend the region. Local tradition connects his name to nearby Menchaca Springs, which are believed to have inspired the community's name. His story reflects the area's deep roots in Texas history and Tejano heritage.

The Menchaca Gardens site originally served as a local volunteer fire hall, which Travis County acquired in the late 1960s. After the fire department built a new station, the former fire hall became the Manchaca Fire Hall Kitchen, a popular restaurant known for fried catfish, casual dining, and live honky-tonk music. The restaurant operated for several decades before closing in the early 2000s.

Travis County later assumed responsibility for the property and began managing it as parkland. Several features associated with its history remain, including the pavilion, garage, well, and former restaurant restroom. In 2021, the County removed the deteriorated fire hall. Today, the pavilion and garage continue to support fire department training, maintaining the site's connection to public service.

Across FM 1626, Manchaca United Methodist Church reflects the area's longstanding traditions of gathering and civic life. Methodist worship dates to at least 1871, and the congregation formally organized in 1874. The present sanctuary was built in 1956–57. A Texas Historical Commission marker, erected in 1994, commemorates the church's history and enduring role in the community. Together, these stories connect Menchaca Gardens to the people and traditions that shaped the area, providing a foundation for honoring the past while creating a welcoming gathering place for the community today and in the future.



Historic sign revealing Menchaca Garden Park's past as a place for community gathering

"Friday nights the fried catfish dinner is unmatched. To top it off, bluegrass with your fish, beans, hush puppies, cole slaw and mmmmm dem peppers. Thank you sir, may I have another!!!" - Community member recounts their experience at a Menchaca Garden's fish fry event.



Community members eating and socializing in the pavilion at a Menchaca Gardens Fish Fry Night

Service Area Program & Park Amenity Inventory

There is an opportunity for Menchaca Gardens Park to complement the area's existing parks with a distinct community experience.

A range of park amenities support recreation, gathering, and outdoor activity within a five-mile radius of Menchaca Gardens Park. Small and large parks, such as Longview Neighborhood Park and Mary Moore Searight Metro Park, offer playgrounds, sports fields, courts, trails, picnic areas, and art installations. Several park preserves and greenbelts also provide spacious wooded and open areas for hiking, biking, and wildlife observation.

While these resources offer a variety of recreational opportunities, many are located more than a mile north of Menchaca Gardens Park. This creates an opportunity for Menchaca Gardens to serve nearby residents with recreational amenities and gathering spaces closer to home.

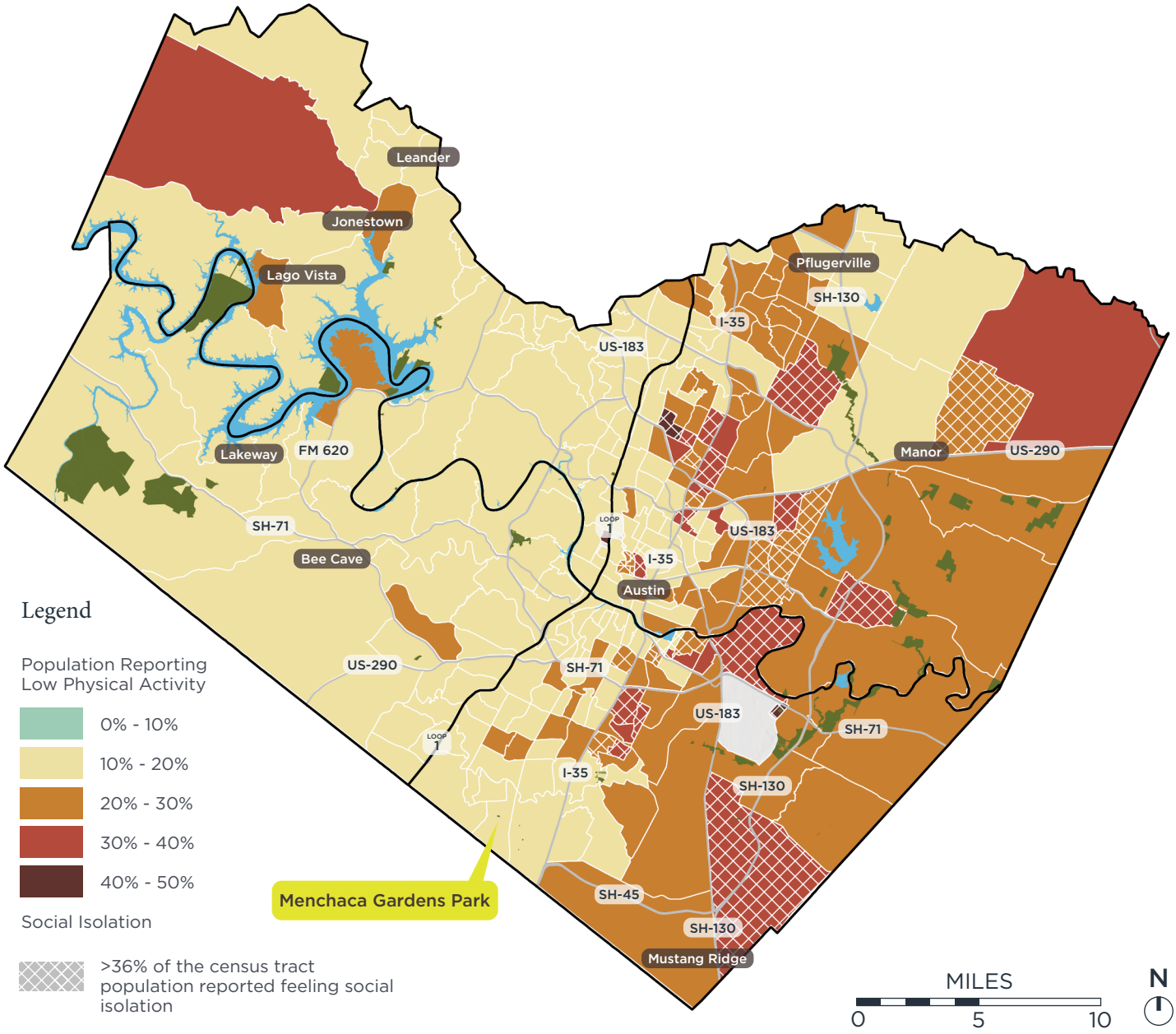


Playing courts at Mary Moore Searight Metro Park in the Menchaca Gardens service area

Park Amenities & Programs	Menchaca Gardens Park 5-mile Radius Service Area Number of Facilities	Travis County Number of Facilities	Southeast Planning Area Number of Facilities
Playgrounds or play structures	17	28	8
Basketball courts	6	12	2
Trails: hiking, biking	28	N/A	N/A
Multiuse courts: tennis, pickleball	2	2	0
Disc golf	2	1	0
Handball	1	N/A	N/A
Volleyball court	4	N/A	N/A
Diamond Fields	10	31	14
Pavilion/Shelter: pavilion, covered picnic area, or covered individual tables	13	38	8
Amphitheater	1	N/A	N/A
Recreation/Community Center	1	N/A	N/A

Community Health

Menchaca Gardens can support community health by providing opportunities for physical activity, social connection, and time outdoors.



Menchaca Gardens is located in a Travis County census tract where approximately 10–20% of residents report no leisure-time physical activity. Countywide, 22% of residents report physical inactivity and 36% report social isolation. Overall, Travis County's health indicators generally align with national averages, with slightly higher rates of social isolation and depression and slightly lower rates of physical inactivity, obesity, and high blood pressure. Parks and greenways can support community health by providing welcoming places for physical activity, social connection, and time outdoors.

Ecology and Natural Systems

Menchaca Gardens' mature trees, woodland, and emphemeral creek provide opportunities to create a resilient park that balances recreation, habitat, shade, and ecological health.

Menchaca Gardens is located within the Blackland Prairie ecoregion and its existing natural features provide an important foundation for future park design and management. The developed portion of the site is relatively flat and slopes toward an unnamed ephemeral tributary that crosses the lower portion of the property before flowing toward Bear Creek. The drainage is bordered by hackberry- and cedar elm-dominated woodland, while mature live oaks along the northern edge provide significant shade, habitat, and character.

The site includes a mix of Crawford clay, Eddy gravelly loam, and Castephen silty clay loam soils, with ecological site classifications including Southern Chalky Ridge and Deep Redland. These soil and landscape conditions, combined with the site's woodland and ephemeral drainage, contribute to ecological diversity within the relatively small property.

The Travis County Land Management Plan identifies Menchaca Gardens as having higher environmental vulnerability, influenced in part by the site's small size and presence of non-native invasive species.

Existing development associated with the former fire station, including foundations, driveways, and other infrastructure, has also disturbed portions of the property. Slopes toward the ephemeral tributary may create stormwater and erosion considerations, while FM 1626 and adjacent development influence the site's viewshed and ambient noise.

Despite these constraints, the site has several ecological strengths that can be carried forward into the future park. Mature trees, existing woodland, the ephemeral waterway, and areas of open space provide opportunities to balance recreation, habitat, shade, and ecological function. Future management should focus on protecting existing mature trees, enhancing native woodland and vegetation around the ephemeral creek, and controlling invasive vegetation through targeted treatment and follow-up monitoring. These strategies can strengthen habitat and ecological function while supporting a resilient, low-maintenance landscape appropriate for a neighborhood-serving park.



Ringtail captured crawling in the metal beams of the site pavilion

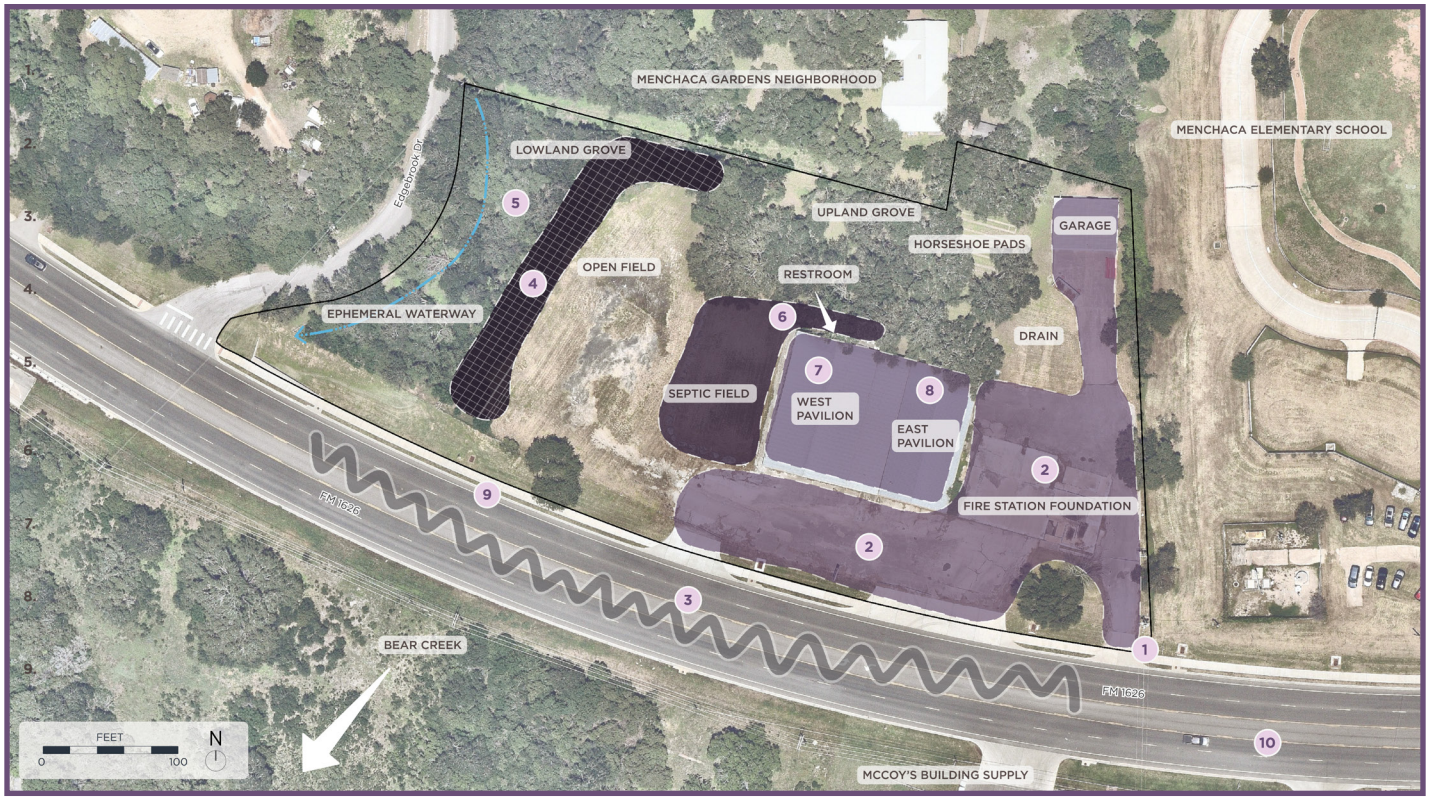
Ephemeral waterway in the lowland grove

Park Opportunities & Challenges Assessment

The Menchaca Gardens site challenges and opportunities provide a framework for thoughtful design, future investment, and long-term stewardship.

Site Challenges

Menchaca Gardens presents a range of physical, environmental, infrastructure, and contextual challenges that will shape the future park. These conditions are not simply constraints, but opportunities to guide thoughtful design, prioritize investment, and make the most of the site's limited space and existing assets. The Vision Plan will explore ways to design with and around these conditions, while improving safety, accessibility, ecological function, and the overall experience of the park. The following challenges will help inform future programming, site design, infrastructure improvements, and long-term management.



1. Small, Constrained Site

Limited space and parking capacity require a focused program that avoids overdevelopment.

2. Disturbed Site & Impervious Cover

Former fire station uses, foundations, driveways, infrastructure, and areas of gravel fill have altered the site.

3. FM 1626 Impacts

Traffic, noise, and pedestrian safety create challenges along the site's frontage.

4. Stormwater & Erosion

Slopes toward the ephemeral waterway create drainage and erosion considerations.

5. Invasive Species

Non-native invasive vegetation is present within the lowland grove and requires targeted management and ongoing monitoring.

6. Aging & Non-ADA Infrastructure

The septic system is outdated and decommissioned, and the restroom facilities do not meet current accessibility standards.

7. Existing Structure Upgrades

Structures retained on site will require ongoing maintenance and potential improvements.

8. Structure Removal

Removal of existing structures may be necessary depending on future programming and site needs.

9. Utility Availability

Existing utilities need to be investigated to determine potential connections for future sanitary uses.

10. Distance from Park Hubs

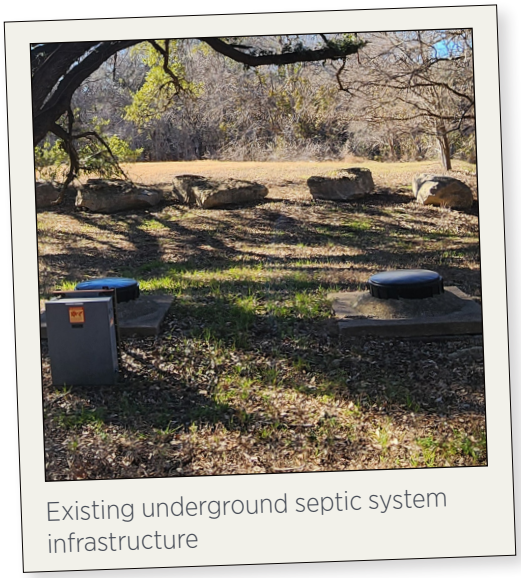
The site is separated from other major Travis County park hubs and destinations.



Impervious cover made up of former fire station foundation and driveways



FM 1626 road along the entrance of Menchaca Gardens park



Existing underground septic system infrastructure

Site Opportunities

Menchaca Gardens also has a range of community, natural, cultural, and physical assets that provide a strong foundation for the future park. These opportunities can help shape a place that reflects the character and history of the community while providing meaningful spaces for recreation, gathering, learning, and connection to nature. The Vision Plan will build on these existing assets to create a welcoming, flexible, and resilient neighborhood park that responds to community needs and connects the site to the broader park and ecological systems.



1. Established Community History

Strong connection to local history, identity, and community memory.

2. Mature Live Oak Canopy

Significant shade, habitat, and site character.

3. Ecological Diversity

Woodland and ephemeral waterway support habitat and nature-based experiences.

4. Community & Educational Partnerships

Adjacency to Menchaca Elementary and other community assets creates opportunities for learning, stewardship, and community programming.

5. Existing Structures and Shade

Pavilion, stage, and garage support flexible programming and gathering.

6. Producing Water Well

Existing producing well provides a potential water resource for future landscape, irrigation, or educational uses, subject to further investigation and applicable requirements.

7. Gateway to the Park System

Potential connection to nearby parks and greenway projects.

8. FM 1626 Connectivity

Access to surrounding neighborhoods, destinations, and communities.

9. Proximity to Bear Creek

Close proximity to Bear Creek, a tributary to Onion Creek, creates opportunities to connect the park to the broader watershed and greenway system.



Old photo of Menchaca Fire Department parade float


Inside view of pavilion structure


Shady, upland grove area with mature oaks