

PARKS, TRAILS AND BIKEWAYS
LEANDER IS ON THE PATHWAY TO SUCCESS!
By: John D. Cowman, Mayor of Leander

When people consider the quality of life in a community the things they look for are good schools, a diversity of commerce and livability. Key livability components include recreation opportunities and alternative means of transportation. When looking to relocate, Fortune 500 companies consider parks and trails as an important quality of life component.

In Leander we recognize the need for parks, open space and the need to provide our citizens with a variety of transportation choices including alternatives that are safe, green and healthy. Such alternatives include trails and bikeways that link neighborhoods, parks, schools, churches, retail and employment areas. That's why in 2004 we created our *Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan* with trails as a major component. Even Capital Metro is getting into the mix with its "Rails with Trails" initiative. This will be a trail along the rail that in the future will link Austin with Leander, and in the very near future, Capital Metro's Commuter Rail service will begin so our citizens will be able to park their cars and ride the rail all the way into Austin!

Even though our park and trail systems are in their infancy we know that providing transportation alternatives are essential, and we are planning for the future. Today, Leander has approximately 5.6 miles of bikeways, but none of them are contiguous and connected. We have trails in our parks and the Heritage Trail connects Bledsoe and Benbrook Ranch Parks, but for the most part we lack the continuity that provides connectivity throughout our City. When we consider new commercial and residential developments we require new development address needs for trails, pedestrian ways and parkland as they go through the platting process. In 2007 we revised our *City Roadway Plan* to include key *Master Plan* trail components that parallel arterial and collector streets. As a result, new developments are required to set aside right-of-way or construct trails and bikeways if the development is within an identified trail corridor.

In 2006, internationally acclaimed economist Ray Perryman and *The Perryman Group* published a study entitled *Sunshine, Soccer & Success – An Assessment of the Impact that Municipal Parks & Recreation Activities & Programs Have on Business Activities in Texas*. The Perryman Group determined: 1) the close proximity to parks is positively associated with increased property values; 2) people are willing to pay to live next to greenways and parks, thus enhancing property values that expand the tax base; 3) superior recreational facilities tend to raise values across an entire area; 4) the overall benefits to local economies far exceed the costs associated with parks and recreation programs, and funding for local parks represents a good investment of taxpayer dollars, bringing overall benefits that far exceed actual costs; 5) the availability of open space improves psychological health and those with access to parks tend to exercise more; and 6) individuals and communities benefit from reducing physical ailments and medical costs associated with exercise.

Trails, bikeways and parks improve our health, increase property values, reduce traffic and congestion, and they provide places for fun and family activity. Your Leander city government will do everything possible to ensure that Leander's growth includes quality parks, trails and bikeways!