



2905 Rogge Lane
Austin, Texas 78723

stevenbrownford1atx@gmail.com

July 16, 2026

Mayor Kirk Watson and City of Austin Council Members
301 W. 2nd Street
Austin, TX 78701

Re: Reversing the Decision Not to Reopen the Commercial Kitchen at Givens Recreation Center

Dear Mayor Watson and Members of the Austin City Council,

I am writing to urge the City of Austin to reverse its decision not to reopen the commercial kitchen at Givens Recreation Center. I raised this issue directly in my public testimony before the Austin Parks and Recreation Board on June 22, 2026, and I am following up in writing because this decision deserves the attention of the Mayor and every Council member; especially after receiving a denial response from the City of Austin Deputy Director.

The City of Austin acquired Givens Park in 1957, and in 1962 it was named in honor of Dr. Everett H. Givens. Dr. Givens was a dentist, World War 1 Veteran, and a civil rights leader who spent his life fighting for East Austin. He challenged his own exclusion from a UT Dental program in 1946, served as one of the city's first Black firefighters, and organized East Austin voters against the discriminatory white primary. The park bears his name as a living reminder that Givens has long been a vital gathering place for minority Austinites during and after segregation, when the 1928 City Master Plan forcibly relocated Black and Latino residents and public services east of what is now I-35. For decades, the working kitchen at Givens has been central to how this community has gathered, fed itself, and cared for one another; through cookouts, senior programs, youth events, and holiday celebrations. A functional kitchen is not a luxury. **It is historic community infrastructure.**

The City's decision to decline funding for the kitchen dismisses not just a practical need, but the everyday civic life of East Austin residents. It sends a message that community-led priorities in East Austin are optional, not essential. This decision cannot be viewed in purely financial terms, because that analysis ignores ethical values that are essential but difficult to price: justice, fairness, community, culture, and identity. Your decisions also come as the City of Austin continues to direct extraordinary sums toward high-profile downtown park projects. The Confluence, the new 13-acre park along Waller Creek that opened this June, cost \$91.5 million, with over \$62 million in city funding. This investment has delivered environmental benefits, such as expansion of tree canopies and erosion control along Waller Creek, but it primarily serves tourism. A functioning commercial kitchen at Givens Park, estimated at approximately \$700,000, would deliver a different kind of public good: **one that positively impacts residents' dignity and democratic voice through autonomy, food security, and family gathering**. Measured against a \$91.5 million downtown project, a \$700,000 investment in a commercial kitchen for East Austin, one of the fastest-gentrifying areas in the city, is not a large ask.



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As local reporting has highlighted, the level of public investment in a single downtown park project has prompted citywide debate over whether park resources are being concentrated in already well-resourced downtown areas while neighborhood parks in historically underserved communities are left behind. Well-respected environmental advocates also have stressed that the debate is not about whether Austin should invest in parks, but how those investments are distributed across the city.

The Austin Parks Foundation has identified more than \$1.8 billion in capital needs across the city's park system. The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department itself now cites equity metrics — population served, area income, people of color served, and children served — as its top weighted criteria for prioritizing capital projects. If equity is truly the department's priority, then a modest commercial kitchen at Givens Park is not an exception to the \$1.8 billion in identified need. It is a baseline equity investment. If Austin can commit tens of millions in public dollars to downtown park projects, it can and should fund basic, community-serving infrastructure that long-time residents have been requesting since the recreation center renovation process began, in a park that carries generations of historic and civic significance.

The City has cited recent unforeseen infrastructure assessments as the primary reason for delaying completion of the Givens Recreation Center kitchen. East Austin residents were informed in late 2025 that ductwork replacement and repairs to a fractured wastewater line were necessary, and we appreciate the City's efforts to address those important improvements. However, residents were never clearly informed that a non-compliant grease interceptor had become a significant factor in the decision not to complete and reopen the kitchen. Because this issue directly affects the project's scope, timeline, and budget, the community deserved timely, transparent communication regarding both the problem and the City's proposed path forward. These are all solvable problems with known costs.

Austin Water's Grease Trap Sizing and Design Criteria require that commercial kitchen grease interceptors meet current City standards. Any replacement is subject to permitting, inspection, and code compliance; all standard processes the City conducts regularly. These are well-understood infrastructure improvements with fully predictable costs. Depending on the final kitchen design specifications, a compliant grease interceptor system could estimate to cost between \$17,700 and \$49,000. This is a reasonable addition to the overall kitchen project budget of approximately \$700,000. These infrastructure upgrades do not justify indefinitely deferring a project the community has requested for years. The City of Austin regularly manages these types of fixes across its park system. It can and should do the same for Givens.

Moreover, the kitchen is not intended to operate as a full-time commercial food service facility. It would continue to primarily be rented out for recreation center programming, community events, and facility rentals. As such, it represents a manageable operational commitment while delivering significant public value. Completing the kitchen would expand opportunities for youth programs, senior activities, cultural celebrations, workforce training, nonprofit partnerships, and more that strengthen neighborhood connections.



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Accordingly, I respectfully urge Mayor Watson and City Council Members to:

1. Direct the Austin Parks and Recreation Department to reverse its decision and allocate the funding necessary to complete a fully functional, code-compliant commercial kitchen at Givens Recreation Center.
2. Direct the Austin Parks and Recreation Department to establish and publicly communicate a clear timeline for completing the kitchen.
3. Reevaluate this project using the City's adopted equity framework and ensure District 1 receives the same level of investment afforded to recreation centers in other parts of Austin.
4. Identify and reallocate available capital or maintenance funding necessary to complete the project rather than deferring it indefinitely.

Givens Park has waited long enough for the City of Austin to treat it as the civic asset it is. East Austin families deserve the same quality public facilities available elsewhere in our city. Completing this kitchen is more than a construction project; it is an investment in equity, public trust, and the long-term vitality of one of Austin's most historic neighborhoods. **We ask you not to let this be one more decision that tells East Austin its needs come after downtown's.** District 1 deserves better. Our city's parks history demands better.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with your office.

Respectfully,

Steven Brown
Austin City Council District 1 Candidate
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ENCLOSURES



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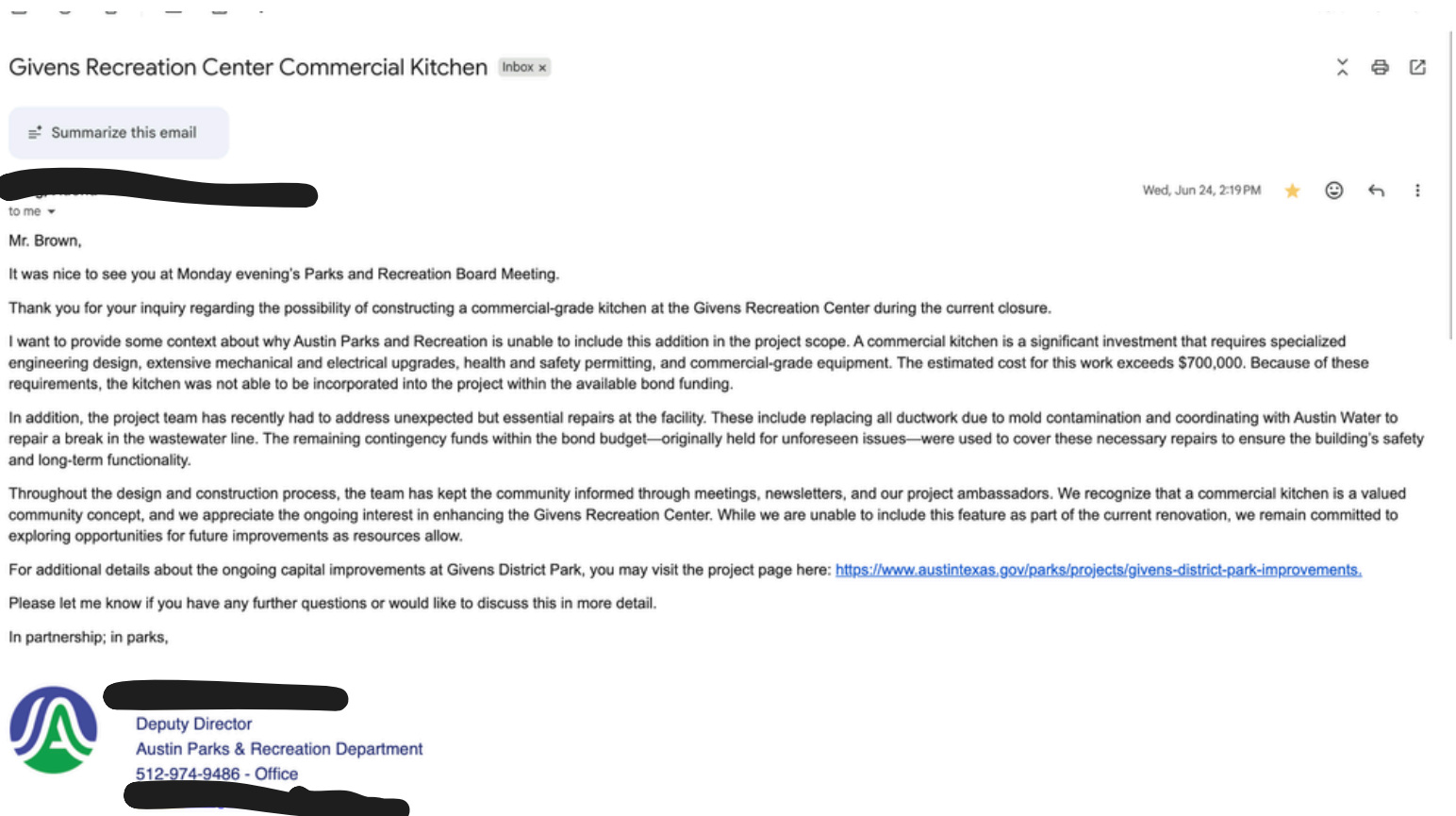


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Appendix

A. City of Austin Parks & Recreation Department Denial Response





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B. Grease Trap Installation Cost Estimates

Based on the City of Austin's Grease Trap Sizing & Design Criteria (Austin Water, 2021), commercial kitchen grease interceptors must meet specific minimum sizes:

- 100-gallon minimum for basic food service
- 500-gallon minimum for food service with a dishwasher

Installation and compliance costs for these systems are estimated as follows, based on industry cost analysis:

- 100-gallon system: \$8,700–\$24,500
- 500-gallon system: \$17,700–\$49,000

(Source: Grease Trap Locator. (2026, March 8). Grease Trap Installation Cost: What to Budget for Your Restaurant. Retrieved from <https://greasetraplocator.com/grease-trap-installation-cost/>)

These are standard, well-understood requirements that the City of Austin regularly manages across capital projects, as outlined in the [City's Procurement Policies and Programs](#).

C. Givens Recreation Center Kitchen Rental Agreement



Givens Recreation Center
3811 East 12th Street
512-974-2430

www.austintexas.gov/department/givens-recreation-center

Security

It shall be the responsibility of the person or organization making the reservation to provide the necessary security to ensure orderly behavior and protect property. A security plan with proof may be required and will need to be reviewed by the Program Supervisor fifteen (15) days in advance.

- Reservations are not made to minors, eighteen (18) and under.
- All children and teen parties must have one (1) adult Chaperon per ten (10) minors.

Utilities

The building is heated/cooled by a computerized thermostat controlled **off-site**. The temperature cannot be adjusted immediately during your event. Alternative use of lighting, for example, battery operated candles, Christmas lights, and battery operated lanterns must be approved by Program Supervisor.

Kitchen

To protect the facility's plumbing infrastructure, the use of Austin Parks and Recreation (APR) center's kitchens is strictly limited. Because these kitchens are not equipped with a required Grease Interceptor (GI), absolutely no activities that generate Fats, Oils, or Grease (FOG) may be conducted on the premises. This prohibition encompasses nearly all traditional cooking methods—such as cooking, baking, frying, boiling, steaming, indoor grilling, and soup making—as well as any process involving ingredients or cleanup where FOG is present.

In addition to these restrictions, please note the following requirements:

- Authorization is required for all kitchen use.
- All dishes and utensils used must be disposable.
- All food trays, food service equipment, pots, pans, and serving utensils brought into the facility shall not be washed on these premises; they must be removed for cleaning.
- No food preparation is to be conducted in kitchen sinks.
- Hand sinks are not prep sinks or dump sinks; they are for hand washing only.

Curfew

The park curfew is 10pm Sunday through Saturday. Police strictly enforce curfew hours and violators are subject to fines and/or arrest.

Endorsements

Rental of PARD facility does not constitute City of Austin or PARD endorsement of viewpoints expressed by participants in the program. Advertisements or announcements implying such endorsements, or that utilize City logos are not permitted.

Violations

The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to cancel any event and has the authority to remove any person(s) from the facility if it is felt that any part(s) of this