



# City Council Agenda Item Report

January 15, 2013

## Agenda Item No.

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**Subject: Staff Report regarding the 2012 Buda Trail of Lights.**

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### 1. Background / History

The inaugural Trail of Lights event was held for approximately two weeks in December of 2009 at Stagecoach Park. The event was a success with approximately 3,000 visitors enjoying the lights along the park roadway. The event was held near the front of the park along the roadway entering the park as the remainder of the park was still under construction. There were approximately 18 businesses and organizations that participated in the event setting up lighted displays. The event cost approximately \$45,000 with no revenue received.

The 2010 Trail of Lights was held December 16-22 from 6-10 p.m. at Stagecoach Park. There were approximately 11,000 visitors to see the Trail of Lights with some of those visiting the downtown area as some of the downtown merchants stayed open late and had activities December 16-18 in conjunction with the Trail of Lights. All five shuttle busses stopped in downtown during these dates. There was a special senior citizen night on December 15 with pie and hot chocolate served by the Buda Lions Club at City Hall to approximately 30 seniors and travel to the Trail of Lights was provided in a school shuttle bus. Two courtesy golf carts were used throughout the event transporting those who needed assistance along the Trail of Lights.

There was a new layout of the event that year with the opening of the trail and parking lot in the back of park going to the pond area. The entire event was held along the trail creating a true Trail of Lights. The 1 kilometer (.62 mile) trail loop and park roadway was lined with approximately 20,000 LED lights and 47 business and organization displays positioned around the trail. The windmill was decorated with lights to resemble a Christmas tree. Christmas music was played and heard all along the trail. In addition, there was a Santa's Village with Santa Claus every night. The Santa Cruz Catholic School provided concessions near the pavilion and at the start of the trail. All parking was at Cabela's and visitors were shuttled to the park similar to 2009. The event cost approximately \$42,000 with \$19,000 received in revenue for a net cost of \$23,000 to the General Fund.

The 2011 Trail of Lights was held on December 14-21 from 6-10 p.m. at Stagecoach Park. The event was free to the public. The 1 kilometer (.62 mile) trail loop was lined with approximately 25,000 LED lights and 48 business and organization displays positioned around the trail. Staff lined the walking trail with LED lights leading from the Stagecoach House and Visitors Center to where the lighted displays were located. The windmill was decorated with lights to resemble a Christmas tree in addition to a Christmas tree that was added to the island in the middle of the pond. Christmas music was played and heard all along the trail. In addition, there was a Santa's Village with Santa Claus every night. The Santa Cruz Catholic School provided concessions near the pavilion and at the start of the trail. All parking was at Cabela's and visitors were shuttled to the park similar to previous years.

There was a special senior citizen night on December 13 with pie and hot chocolate served at City Hall by the Buda Lions Club to approximately 60 seniors and travel to the Trail of Lights provided in shuttle buses provided by the Creekside Villas Senior Apartments. Two courtesy golf carts were used throughout the event transporting those who needed assistance along the Trail of Lights.

Marketing efforts went beyond Buda that year reaching Austin since the city had canceled their annual lights display at Zilker Park again. There were approximately 11,000 visitors to see the Trail of Lights despite two rainout days. This was the same attendance as the previous year. The event cost approximately \$35,000 with \$21,000 received in revenue for a net cost of \$14,000 to the General Fund.

## **2. FINDINGS/CURRENT ACTIVITY**

The 2012 Trail of Lights was held on December 14-22 from 6-10 p.m. at Stagecoach Park. The event was free to the public. The 1 kilometer (.62 mile) trail loop was lined with approximately 25,000 LED lights and 54 business and organization displays positioned around the trail. Staff lined the walking trail with LED lights leading from the Stagecoach House and Visitors Center to where the lighted displays were located. The windmill was decorated with lights to resemble a Christmas tree. Christmas music was played and heard all along the trail. In addition, there was a Santa's Village with Santa Claus every night. The Santa Cruz Catholic School provided concessions near the pavilion. All parking was at Cabela's and visitors were shuttled to the park similar to previous years. Four courtesy golf carts were used throughout the event transporting those who needed assistance along the Trail of Lights.

New this year was a 60 foot tall Zilker type tree of lights that was located near the playground area at Stagecoach Park. The star could be seen from I35 coming in from Austin and along Main Street and FM 967. With the Stagecoach Park pond being restored and holding water now, the pond was fully operational with both water fountains spraying water with holiday lighting shining up on the two water fountains. The pond was surrounded with a double row of lights. In addition, several groups provided entertainment this year including the Buda First Baptist Church, Dance Unlimited Buda, Dance by Carly, Outside Voices, DeJa Flute Ensemble, and Camp Cookie Productions.

There was a special senior citizen night on December 13 with pie and hot chocolate served by the Buda Lions Club at City Hall to approximately 80 seniors. Travel to the Trail of Lights was in shuttle buses provided by the Creekside Villas Senior Apartments and the Huntington Senior Apartments. On December 14-15, the Downtown Merchants Association hosted a special Holiday Extravaganza from 6-9 p.m. on the Greenbelt. Approximately 10 vendors set up booths on the Greenbelt and some of the downtown merchants stayed open late for last minute holiday shopping. All 10 shuttle busses operating stopped in downtown during those dates and time.

Marketing efforts went beyond Buda again this year reaching Austin even though Austin reinstated their trail of lights. Even with competing against Austin, there were approximately 12,000-15,000 visitors to see the Buda Trail of Lights which was more than the previous year. Park visitors commented on several occasions how easy it was to get to Buda's Trail of Lights and appreciated not feeling congested as they walked the trail.

It is anticipated that the 2013 Buda Trail of Lights will be held December 13-22 (proposed adding one extra day) with the special senior citizen night being held on December 12 if funding is approved in the 2013/2014 fiscal year.

**3. FINANCIAL IMPACT**

In the 2012/2013 fiscal year budget, the City Council approved \$35,000 from the General Fund and \$5,000 (for advertising purposes only) from the Hotel Occupancy Tax Fund (HOT) to fund the Trail of Lights. The event cost \$34,817.74 with \$22,404.99 received in revenue for a net cost of \$12,412.88 to the General Fund. It is believed that the Trail of Lights generated significant sales tax revenue for Buda.

**4. ACTION OPTIONS/CONSIDERATION**

This item is for informational purposes only.