

Sarah Jenkins

Dear Fellow Board Members,

I extend my deepest regrets that I cannot be present at the meeting today, but there has been a family emergency. However, I am aware that several time-sensitive matters are up for a crucial vote today--most importantly, the decision to redevelop the Brackenridge Tract. I feel that this decision cannot be postponed for another month, and as such have decided to cast my vote in absentia by submitting this document as my official opinion.

When Colonel George Brackenridge donated the original 503 acres of what is now called the Brackenridge Tract in 1910, he clearly designated a specific use for the property in the deed. He states that the land is “for the purpose of advancing and promoting University education” for the University of Texas (Deed). As stated in the Brackenridge Task Force Report, Col. Brackenridge hoped to use his own lands, and the contingent lands of a friend also committed to the University, to build a new campus. However, that plan materialized neither within Col. Brackenridge’s own lifetime, nor after his death. By 1963, the Board of Directors for the University officially concluded that the University could not be moved to another site, and the Regents began to research other possible uses for the land such as student housing, recreation facilities, and research facilities. Following that decision, in response to a request from several different departments within the Natural Sciences disciplines, the Regents set aside approximately 80 acres of land within the Brackenridge Tract for a field research laboratory in 1967 (Brackenridge).

Today, this area of land is known as the Brackenridge Field Lab, where for 45 years University faculty and students have produced outstanding research. In 1989, the University and the City of Austin finalized the Brackenridge Development Agreement, which established development rights for the Brackenridge Tract. Above all else, the agreement renews a 30-year lease between the City and the University for the Municipal Golf Course that cannot be terminated until 2019. Additionally, the

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agreement specifies that the Brackenridge Field Lab cannot be developed for non-University purposes until 2019.

The Task Force, at the commission of the Board of Regents, studied the tract in all its facets for many months before presenting us with a comprehensive report which offers many recommendations, the most pertinent of which follow:

1. The Brackenridge Development Agreement should be allowed to terminate in 2019.
2. The Master Plan should take into account the Brackenridge Field Lab and decide, with input from the University, whether to incorporate the Lab into the development plans or move it to another location.

These two recommendations closely align with the vote before the board today: to professionally develop the Brackenridge Tract, or continue with the current usages.

Based on the Task Force's well-researched report, I concur with their findings and vote in the affirmative for the Brackenridge Tract to be redeveloped into a mixed-use neighborhood, with one condition: the Brackenridge Field Lab should be excluded from the designing process and left intact. I believe the Lab is too important a resource to the University to be converted to a golf course or condominiums.

The Brackenridge Tract should be commercially developed for several compelling reasons. First, the previous uses of the land have served the University well until recently. When the tract was originally donated, the land was on the outside edge of town, but now it sits alongside a main north-south highway, Loop 1 Mo-Pac, and near several major streets such as Exposition and Lake Austin Blvd. The land is due south of Tarrytown, a popular residential area known for its wealth, and due to such proximity to both the neighborhood and the Colorado River, the value of the land has risen dramatically

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in the last few decades to a far higher value than the University is recouping from it. While Col. Brackenridge's original intent for the land as a new home for the University can never be realized, it is our duty as the Board of Regents to use the land in accordance with Col. Brackenridge's purpose for "the benefit of the University of Texas" (Deed), which previous regents agreed included leasing of the land as a source of revenue to support programs and scholarships at the University. Our development plan continues stands upon this precedent to use the tract to benefit of the University. The University of Texas at Austin is currently striving to become a world-class university, but significant funds to improve facilities, support programs, and attract world-class professors and researchers is necessary to attain this worthy goal. The revenue generated by the development of the Brackenridge Tract will contribute substantially to that funding, as well as scholarships and fellowships.

In addition, if the University develops the tract, it will not only create a more cohesive and integrated development, but the University will have almost direct control over how the land is used, as opposed to leasing it to other agents who would control development. Control, as pointed out by the Task Force Report, gives the University a unique opportunity to interact with the community and establish itself as a "foundational, urban institute" (report.pdf). The University's participation will foster more mixed-use developments in the Austin area--something the City of Austin has already introduced and supported through projects such as the redevelopment of the Mueller Airport and smaller sites such as The Triangle between Guadalupe, Lamar, and 46th streets. In addition, much of the proposed redevelopment caters to pedestrian traffic as opposed to automobile traffic. This design upholds the City of Austin's focus on reducing emissions and helping the city become environmentally friendly; their efforts include the expansion of existing bus lines, the creation of the MetroRail lines, and the implementation of electronic parking meters in new locations to encourage use of high occupancy transportation ("Capital"). The University will have a chance to set a new standard for future development in Austin.

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As stated earlier, I do approve the decision to redevelop the Brackenridge Tract, but only on the condition that the Brackenridge Field Lab remains undisturbed. Currently, the land is leased for a variety of uses, including a marina, the Austin Municipal Golf Course, and the West Austin Youth Association. Other sections of the tract contains graduate student housing, namely the Colorado and Brackenridge Apartments, built in the 1960s and 70s. The plans for development already include plans to expand graduate housing on another piece of University owned land to compensate for the loss of these apartments. If these leases are allowed to expire, and the graduate student housing is moved, then the University will have approximately 265 acres of land to develop, while leaving the 80 acres of Field Lab in its current state. This Lab provides a special chance for students attending the University of Texas at Austin to participate in field research on a regular basis, and as such a unique educational gem, it should be allowed to continue.

As stated earlier, Col. Brackenridge intended for his land to be used as a new home for the University, because in 1910, the student population was already outgrowing its forty-acre home. Since it was never a feasible option to move the University, I feel that it is necessary to retain some of the land for educational purposes, in order to remain faithful to the intention of the gift. This goal can be accomplished in two ways: first, leave the Field Lab intact as a research facility; second, use some of the development of other lands to house non-academic university facilities such as administration buildings. Even though we are using the funds earned from the development to support university programs, if we demolish a working research facility to accomplish that purpose, we contradict our goal of supporting existing programs.

Currently, the Lab is used “by an average of 15 faculty, more than 20 graduate students, and 200-300 undergraduate students” in a given year (Brackenridge). For most students and faculty, regular use of the facilities is only possible because of the Field Lab’s proximity to the main campus, a distance

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of approximately three miles. This proximity allows students, particularly undergraduates, to attend classes at the Field Lab on regular school days more than once a week, which equates to the students spending more time performing experiments and gaining the experience they will need to work as scientific researchers after they graduate (Brackenridge). Several recommendations have been given to move the Brackenridge Field Lab to a new home, perhaps on the McKinney Roughs, or to expand other existing ecological research facilities. However, moving the Brackenridge Field Lab destroys its usefulness to the University: students could no longer attend classes on a regular basis; instead, their time in the lab facilities would be significantly reduced, limiting the amount of hands-on research opportunities for students. If the University wants to create a world-class university that fosters research at all levels, as it has previously promoted through such programs as the Freshman Research Initiative and the Undergraduate Research Forum, it needs to show that students of all disciplines receive real experience in their field (“Undergraduate”).

Moreover, the research currently in progress at the Brackenridge Field Lab is highly relevant to many growing cities today. Many students are working to discover the long-range implications of development on local ecological systems and individual species. This research hopes to describe the affect of urban development on animal populations around the region. In addition, others are studying how invasive species adapt to new environments and how these invasive species can be controlled without pesticides that often kill indiscriminately. Currently, there is a big push in our culture to use organic means to control harmful pests and invasive species, rather than harmful chemicals. To this end, the Brackenridge Field Lab is leading the research on using “phorid flies as biocontrols” for the invasive Red Imported Fire Ant, a well-known nuisance in Texas that arrived only a few decades ago (Brackenridge). Many state governments are considering the use of phorid flies as a natural pest control system as opposed to using harmful chemicals, all based on research done mostly by UT faculty at the

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Brackenridge Field Lab. The Lab is obviously still a vibrant facility continually searching for and proposing answers to relevant scientific questions.

To conclude, I reiterate: Develop the Brackenridge Tract and make a unique contribution to the design of Austin as it continues to search for ways to make itself a green city, but leave the Brackenridge Field Laboratory intact. It seems ironic to me that the University would desire to use this land as an example of how a pedestrian-oriented, environmentally friendly city should look, but in the process destroy a vast area of wildlife environment; or that the University would use the tract as a source of funding for new programs by ruining a useful and vibrant program in the process. I agree that in order to grow, the University needs a new source of funds, but I feel sufficient funds can be generated in the development of the remaining 265 acres of land. Additionally, the educational benefits of the ecological research done at the Brackenridge Field Lab far outweigh the financial benefits of developing it.

I look forward to the results of today's vote, and I again ask for your forgiveness for my unavoidable absence.

Sincerely,

Sarah Jenkins

UT System Board of Regents

CEO/CFO Capital Real Estate Investment Firm

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