

KEY EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF SAND BEACH RESERVE - 6/8/2026

1839

Officials of the Republic of Texas selected more than 7,000 acres to become the new seat of government, Austin. That land became known as the “Government Tract.”

1839

A townsite of 640 acres was surveyed into streets, blocks, and lots, becoming the original townsite of Austin. The town lots (sometimes called “in-lots”) were sold at auction.

1840

A joint resolution of Congress directed the Secretary of the Treasury to have the remaining land in the Government Tract surveyed into streets, alleys, and lots of five to forty acres. These were called “Outlots.” **The resolution also required the Secretary “to reserve in the plan fixed on, four hundred acres for such public purposes as Congress may hereafter direct.”**

Thomas G. Gordon petitioned Congress to sell him a tract of land in the Reserve that later became Outlot 11. Following his death, Congress approved its sale to Francis C. Gordon. Francis had the land surveyed and paid the first of four installments. The land was forfeited to the state in 1848 for nonpayment. No copy of the survey has been found.

1848

The State of Texas issued James Raymond a patent to Outlot 11 of Division Z. Referred to as sixty acres of land, it was described as bounded on the east by West Avenue, on the north by Pecan (now Sixth) Street, on the west by Outlot 1, on the south by a line 60 yards below the bluff of the “River Commons.”

1850

Part of the original 400 acres reserved in 1840 was surveyed into lots and blocks and sold, becoming Division E of the Outlots.

1863

Sandusky’s original 1840 map of the Outlots was updated by Robert Reich, who added the names of the purchasers.

1871

James Raymond had Outlot 11 surveyed, from Pecan Street back to the bluff, into 10 blocks with lots of varying sizes. A map of the Subdivision of the Raymond Plateau was recorded in the county deed records. Lot sales began.

1876

The International and Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) came into Austin from the west. Its tracks ran through Outlots 1 and 11, in particular along Cypress (now Third) Street.

1880

James Raymond sold the I&GN Railroad “a strip of land sixty yards wide, lying under the main bluff on the South side of Lot Number Eleven, and extending the same width all the way on the South side of said lot and being that part of said lot not heretofore sold by me.” The sale included a requirement “that a good roadway be left under the tracks for the use of the public, over and upon which the said Company has built or may hereafter build its Railroad.”

1881

The railroad built a bridge across the Colorado River. The approach to the bridge from the north was a wooden trestle, not the earthen embankment there today. The current bridge, several feet higher than the first, is reported to have been built in 1909 or 1936.

1885

The plat of the Raymond Plateau subdivision was recorded on page 30 of Plat Book 1. The plat was scaled at 1"= 100' and showed some dimensions or the size of each lot. It described the widths of the streets and sidewalks and dedicated them to the City of Austin. The bluff at the south edge of the subdivision was shown by a row of hachures among some trees. This map is considered the best evidence of the location of the bluff line in 1848. From it the 60 yard strip Raymond sold to the railroad can be located.

1916

Orin Metcalfe made a survey of Sand Beach Reserve for the Department of Health. He made a theoretical location based on a rough map, not on the actual on-the-ground features. This survey became the basis of future claims by private property owners to the north. See O'Hara's 1999 surveyor's report for a detailed critique of Metcalfe's work.

1945

Pursuant to a legislative act, the State sold to the City of Austin the two Reserve tracts and the bed and banks of the Colorado River within the city's then limits. The law provided: **“The grant hereby made to the City of Austin is made for public purposes and in the event of sale by the City of Austin, of the property herein granted, all parts thereof so sold shall revert to the State.”**

1949

In connection with the construction of a railroad depot just southwest of the corner of Baylor and West Third (formerly Crockett and Cypress), the City adopted an ordinance closing to public travel the portion of Baylor Street south of the south line of West Third, and allowing the railroad to use it. The railroad agreed to construct, maintain, and keep open a “driveway and street” on a 40-foot wide strip of railroad property parallel to Lamar. (This is the road up to the Amtrak station.)

1961

The Missouri Pacific Railroad (successor to the I&GN Railroad) sold to the City of Austin a tract of about five acres under the bluff west of Lamar. It was later determined that the tract included land extending more than 180 feet (60 yards) from the bluff and thus included part of the Reserve.

1963

The City of Austin sold the five-acre tract to the Boy Scouts. Because this tract included lands from the Reserve, those lands reverted to the State, as provided in the State's 1945 sale of the Reserve to the City.

1967

The Boy Scouts sold the five-acre tract to the YMCA. In 1988 the Y platted the land as a 4.80 acre subdivision. (See below.)

1974

The City of Austin and tenants of railroad land east of Lamar entered into an agreement to beautify some Reserve land north of West First Street (now Cesar Chavez). The tenants contributed \$20,000 toward the cost of landscaping, irrigating, and constructing driveways and parking areas.

1985

The City Council approved an ordinance to dedicate most City-owned land along Town Lake as parkland. The Reserve lands were included, except for the areas within streets (from curb to curb).

1987

In 1985 three "Lady Plaintiffs" and the State had filed lawsuits challenging the use of the Reserve (1) for an access drive to a proposed office building east of Lamar and (2) for a corner of the building's site plan. In November 1987 the case was declared moot by the Court of Appeals after the developer (Townlake Joint Venture) lost the property through foreclosure. The court reasoned that the driveway ordinance was a conditional contract specific to Townlake Joint Venture, and no one else could assert rights under the challenged ordinances.

1988

As part of the City's approval of the one-lot YMCA subdivision, a restrictive covenant was recorded. It requires that "Before the property may be used or developed for any residential purpose, adequate parkland must be provided to serve the residences, according to city standards and regulations contained in Chapter 13-3 of the Code of the City of Austin." At the backs (south ends) of several lots in the Raymond Plateau the Y plat shows the bluff that forms the north side of the 60 yard strip conveyed to the railroad in 1880. The plat also moved the designated boundaries of the 100-year floodplain.

1993

In the second lawsuit over use of the Reserve east of Lamar, the Third Court of Appeals ruled that the phrase "for public purposes" imposed a restriction on the City's use of the Reserve. However, the court found that the driveways and parking areas previously built on the Reserve served a public purpose and had been impliedly dedicated to the public.

The court ruled that the State had no standing to enforce the restriction. It stated, "The restriction must be enforced by the City, as the City best interprets the public interest, subject to legal or political complaints from its citizens."

1997

In response to the 1993 ruling on State standing by the Court of Appeals, the Texas Legislature adopted Natural Resources Code sec. 31.068. Among other provisions, it grants standing to the Land Commissioner and the Attorney General to enforce a “restriction expressed in a transfer document or legislative act conveying property then owned by the state.”

1999

Surveyor William (Bill) O’Hara completed a report to the City on the north boundary of the Reserve. After detailing the history, he analyzed six possible boundary locations and showed them on a survey map, Exhibit O. He recommended two of the locations as being the “strongest positions” for the north line of the Reserve. He opined that the Metcalfe line “is in the wrong position.”

1999 to 2006

In a third lawsuit filed in 1999 over the Reserve east of Lamar, a Settlement Agreement was finalized in February 2001. Its major thrusts were to use the Metcalfe line as the boundary (except for a wedge of land on the east) and build a new grid of access roads in the Reserve while removing previous access routes. A potential railroad underpass for bikes and pedestrians, leading to an intermodal transit plaza, was included. However, in September 2001 the Austin City Council voted down a requested zoning change incorporating the Settlement Agreement. Major opposition focused on the zoning changes sought to increase the heights of the buildings.

The 2001 Settlement Agreement was superseded by a “Master Agreement” in 2006. Its road network is on the ground now. It included an extension of the Pfluger bridge leading to a bike and pedestrian path between buildings. But a planned railroad underpass near Bowie Street for bikes and people was never built. A meadow in the 2001 design was replaced by a water quality pond next to Lamar. Critics complained about how much of the Reserve was given over to use for private properties.

2025

Agents for the TownlakeYMCA filed documents with the City of Austin for a development assessment of a Planned Unit Development. With 95% impervious cover, the conceptual plan is based on using almost all the land in the YMCA Town Lake subdivision, including land that reverted to the State in 1963.

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