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Astros prepare for exhibition games in Kansas City.
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HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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TEA revises school reopening rules

State plans to spend \$200M for tech as year could start with up to 8 weeks' virtual classes

By Jacob Carpenter
STAFF WRITER

Texas education officials on Friday provided more flexibility to school districts that want to limit or delay in-person classes to

start the 2020-21 school year, a measure of relief for educators and families who argued the state was putting public health at risk by moving too fast to reopen campuses.

Revised guidance released by

the Texas Education Agency allows public school districts to require students with at-home technology to begin the year in virtual classes for up to eight weeks – up from the original three-week maximum.

State officials also partially reversed course on a mandate that all students must have access to full-time, in-person instruction if

they want it. Under the new rules, districts can limit high school students with at-home technology to 40 percent of their time on-campus during each grading period, provided the remaining time is spent in virtual classes.

The changes came as the state's top political leaders announced they will allocate \$200

million in federal coronavirus relief funding for spending on computers, wireless internet hot spots and other technology devices used for at-home learning. The state also will assume a more hands-on role in technology purchasing this month as the prospect of virtual-only classes increases and some districts con-

TEA continues on A17

Memorial Park unveils 'transformative' Glades project

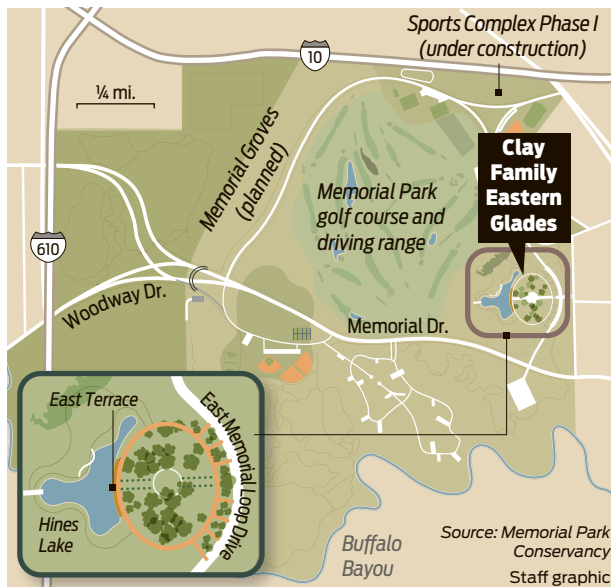


Jon Shapley / Staff photographer

Rosario Perez cleans the sidewalk around Hines Lake in the new Clay Family Eastern Glades section of Memorial Park.

Finding the Glades

The Eastern Glades occupies just 100 of Memorial Park's 1,500 acres but adds significant amenities for passive recreation. The closest parking is the metered lot on East Memorial Loop Drive.



Source: Memorial Park Conservancy Staff graphic

A green space to gather, relax, enjoy nature will open as part of master plan

By Molly Glentzer
STAFF WRITER

The heart of Memorial Park's new Clay Family Eastern Glades resembles a diamond ring in aerial views, with a tip of sparkling water atop its oval promenade. Indeed, a gem has been carved from 100 acres of rough.

Construction fences around a southeastern pocket of the nearly 1,500-acre green space will be removed by month's end, opening up what is essentially a new park within the park. The first major project of Memorial Park's long-simmer-

ing, long-range master plan – set to open the last week of July – has revived land that was previously inaccessible to the public.

"This was a degraded forest filled with invasive plants and drying trees, with soil that was nutritionally depleted," said Memorial Park Conservancy director Shellye Arnold.

Much of the park has been an athlete's playground of running, golf, biking, tennis and ballfields for at least 40 years, but the Glades is designed for passive recreation – relaxation, picnics and nature walks.

"People wanted a place to gather, a place that's kid- and elder-friendly, where they could bring families," Arnold said. "Memorial Park wasn't very friendly for that. It's known as an exercise park." (Phase I of the large, new sports complex

Park continues on A18

State GOP wins suit to hold convention

By Jasper Scherer
STAFF WRITER

A federal judge on Friday ruled that Mayor Sylvester Turner and Houston First Corp. must allow the Texas Republican Party to proceed with an in-person convention at the downtown George R. Brown Convention Center, though the party now intends only to use the facility as a backup option.

Judge Lynn Hughes of the Southern District of Texas found the city had infringed on the Texas GOP's constitutional rights by canceling the convention, which initially was set to run from Thursday through Saturday before Turner ordered Houston First, the city's convention agency, to mix it.

Hughes gave the party the option of using the convention center this weekend and next, according to Jared Woodfill, an attorney for Houston conservative activist Steve Hotze, who initially filed the lawsuit with a handful of other plaintiffs.

The party began its convention online Thursday but encountered technical difficulties with its online credentialing process, forcing delays of several hours and prompting officials to postpone the event until Saturday. The party joined Hotze's lawsuit Friday "to provide a last-resort method in-person if we needed it to secure our national election obligations," Chairman James Dickey said in a statement following Hughes' ruling. He said the party still "is on track to hold its convention online."

Party officials will elect their party chair and select delegates for the Republican National Convention. Ruling continues on A17

Civil rights icon Lewis dies at 80

By Calvin Woodward
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA – John Lewis, a lion of the civil rights movement whose bloody beating by Alabama state troopers in 1965 helped galvanize opposition to racial segregation, and who went on to a long and celebrated

career in Congress, died. He was 80.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi confirmed Lewis' passing late Friday night, calling him "one of the greatest heroes of American history."

"All of us were humbled to call Congressman Lewis

Lewis continues on A14



Lawrence Jackson / Associated Press file

U.S. Rep. John Lewis, shown in 2007, a Democrat from Atlanta, won his seat in Congress in 1986.

Texas again breaks daily deaths record

By Jeremy Blackman and Benjamin Wermund
WASHINGTON BUREAU

Texas recorded 161 coronavirus deaths Friday, breaking the previous daily record as Gov. Greg Abbott continued urging the use of masks to prevent a second

shutdown.

The state is now averaging more than 100 deaths per day, three times the average at the beginning of this month. More than 3,700 Texans have died from the virus since the spring, nearly a third of them in July alone.

Deaths continues on A18

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FROM THE COVER



Photos by Jon Shapley / Staff photographer

Randy Odinet, project director, looks out over Hines Lake on Wednesday in the new Clay Family Eastern Glades section of Memorial Park.

PARK

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closer to Interstate 10 opens later this year.)

From the ground level, the Glades looks like a love child of Hermann Park and the Houston Arboretum, combining manicured lawns, classical terraces and a lake with native wetlands, savanna and woods. Yet it also is very much a place of its own, honoring the history of the land and the city.

A slender strip of the Glades has been open since 2018. It includes an extension of the crowded Seymour Lieberman Exer-trail, the new Eastern Memorial Loop Road into the park, a metered parking lot, a restroom building and a bioswale of native plants.

Now grand views and more enticing magnets are almost ready for their reveal — among them a lawn of cushy “Zorro” Zoysia grass where visitors can sit comfortably on blankets while they observe wildlife a few feet away; Hines Lake, encircled by a boardwalk that becomes a raised trail through wetland woods; picnic pavilions with built-in fireplaces; and a food truck court within a grove of live oaks.

The Glades’ name honors the family of Emily and Robert Clay, who donated \$10 million toward the park’s capital campaign in 2018. The Clays are third- and fourth-generation Houstonians who have walked and run in the park for decades. They helped to underwrite the Glades because it was one of the first projects to be done. “This part of the park was always underutilized, and there was never a pretty place for people just to hang out,” Robert Clay said.

“It’s just a wow,” Emily Clay said. “It hits all the boxes. It’s going to be everyone’s favorite part of the park.”

Recalling Camp Logan

From Blossom Street at Crestwood Drive, a new pedestrian entrance to the park leads through two columns of conical

trees, across the lawn to the lake. This was once the main entry to Camp Logan, the military training facility that occupied the land during World War I. The park was established in 1924 and named “Memorial” to commemorate soldiers who died during the war.

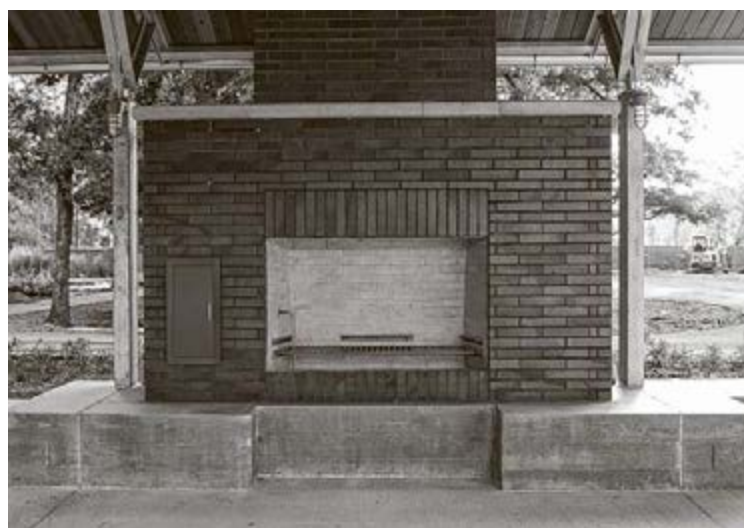
The graceful East Terrace, which overlooks the lake, and several smaller plazas have limestone and brick walls with built-in, stepped seating. In an Art Deco style that echoes the architecture of Houston’s early civic buildings, the structures also are subtle monuments to the history of Camp Logan.

After seeing them for the first time Friday, Mayor Sylvester Turner said he appreciated a memorial “to the good, the bad and the ugly,” thinking also about people who died during the racially fraught Camp Logan Riot of 1917. “It pays tribute to that history in a very respectful way. It’s poignant,” he said.

Connecting more directly to the present, a thin ring of concrete at the center of the lawn holds the inscribed words of Houstonians who submitted postcards expressing their thoughts about the park. Much of the lawn is more shaded, woven into islands of native grasses, trees and flowers that also can be viewed from the perimeter, by walking a half-mile promenade.

“It’s not intended to be the Sheep’s Meadow in Central Park, although it’s the most formal ‘moment’ of the master plan — a civic space,” Arnold said. “The rest of the plan is wilder. This is different because we’re gathering people here, and there’s a theme of healing — the land, people.”

Wildlife has not waited for all the new plants to mature before moving in. Black-bellied whistling ducks, herons, egrets and hawks visit the lake and its 10-foot-wide “wetlands shelf,” which already teems with frogs, dragonflies, minnows and turtles. The lake will also be stocked with fish, although no fishing will be allowed. Under the water’s surface, marine creatures have a custom-built habitat of “fallen” logs and muck.



The north lakeside pavilion won’t be outfitted with tables for now due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Glades significantly improves the park’s ecology in other ways as well. More than 550 new trees, all native species to promote habitat health, are among the thousands of plants that were added after invasive species and diseased trees were removed. That planting will continue for several years.

“The plan was to plant the right plants, in the right soils and with the right drainage, so everything sustains itself,” Arnold said. Rain gardens and bioswales carry stormwater from building roofs and the parking lot, helping to slow and purify it. The runoff gets additional cleansing as it passes through the wetlands and into the lake, which feeds into the park’s largest tributary, on its way to Buffalo Bayou.

Constructing the land bridge

Changes have been underway at Memorial Park since 2012, after a severe drought wiped out about 60 percent of the existing tree canopy. The Conservancy, the Houston Parks Department and the Uptown TRIZ hired the landscape architecture firm Nelson Byrd Woltz to design a master plan in 2013, developing it through several years of sometimes contentious public meetings. City Council approved the plan in 2015.

Members of the Crestwood/

Glencove Civic Club, which represents a neighborhood just east of the park, are excited about the improvements “in general” but still worried about parking and safety issues, said president Tami Hamilton. “They’ve made this pedestrian entrance, but there are no crosswalks to it,” she said, “and there are no continuous sidewalks on either side of Crestwood, where mothers are pushing strollers and people are parking to avoid paying \$1 in the lot built for the Glades.”

The master plan was just a vision a few years ago. Although it will take decades to finish, several major projects were fast-tracked into a 10-year plan in 2018 with a \$70 million gift from the Kinder Foundation.

The Conservancy has raised \$25 million, about half of what it needs, to support the 10-year plan. Further establishing the Glade’s native landscapes will cost a projected \$650,000 annually for several years, she said. (Those costs will decrease over time.)

The Conservancy tackled the Glades first because it has the potential to benefit the most Houstonians the fastest and embodies all of the master plan’s values, Arnold said, reciting a litany: “To reconnect the land, waterways, trails, people and memories; to consolidate compat-

ible uses in appropriate areas; to restore the ecology and human connections to it; to enhance the overall park experience and amenities; and to tend the land and the city’s cultural history and maintain balance through responsible management.”

Nelson Byrd Woltz’s most dramatic improvement is yet to come, designed to solve an issue that happened in 1955 when Memorial Drive was built and split apart the park’s north and south sides. Construction begins later this summer on a land bridge that will arc above Memorial Drive near the park’s west side. With the potential to become a signature symbol of the city, the land bridge will literally create new green space in the air.

That project will take about two years to complete, Arnold said. During construction, the street’s width will be reduced from three lanes to two in each direction.

For now, with COVID-19 codes in place, picnics will have to be small affairs on blankets. Tables won’t be installed in the pavilions or the open pads in the picnic area until large gatherings are deemed safe again. Ditto for a sunning deck along the lake’s boardwalk.

Kinder Foundation co-founders Nancy and Rich Kinder are thrilled by the expansive feeling of the Glades. “It’s just too damn bad we’re in the middle of this pandemic, so people can’t have a big party to celebrate the opening,” Rich Kinder said.

Arnold is disappointed about that, too, but notes that the life of the project is for generations. Turner is thrilled to see a new, major enhancement for the city completed during the pandemic.

“People are ready for some good news, and the Eastern Glades seems to be the shining star,” Nancy Kinder said. “Landscape architects love to show you these beautiful pictures, but being able to execute a transformative project is a gift, and that’s what we’re experiencing now.”

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DEATHS

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In a TV interview with KDFW in Dallas, Abbott tried to highlight a bright spot, saying infections in the DFW Metroplex had plateaued, though it was unclear whether that would hold.

“Whether we go up or down from here will depend on the extent that people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area adopt the practice that was recommended this week by the CDC,” he said, referring to the latest research confirming the effectiveness of masks in slowing transmissions.

The remarks came as the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit watchdog reporting outlet, obtained an unpublished White House document identifying Texas as one of 18 states where the coronavirus has gotten so out of hand that officials should start rolling back their reopenings.

The report, dated Tuesday, says the state should limit social gatherings to 10 or fewer people and restrict indoor dining to 25 percent of their maximum occupancy — down from the 50 percent restaurants can currently serve in Texas — and that officials should close gyms in roughly half the counties in the state, which are considered to be in the “red zone.”

The document says about half of Texas’ 254 counties are in that “red zone” because over 10 percent of coronavirus test results are positive and they have reported more than 100 cases per 100,000 people. The document identifies Harris and Bexar counties as among the top counties in the state based on the number of new cases over the past three weeks.

Another 82 counties are in a “yellow zone,” which indicates the positive test rate is between 5 and 10 percent and that they reported between 50 and 100 cases per 100,000 people. The document

suggests those counties restrict in-person gatherings to 25 people or fewer and should limit gyms to 25 percent capacity.

A Trump administration official said Friday that the document was created by Dr. Deborah Birx, a leader of the White House’s coronavirus task force, and has “been provided to each state to inform and assist with their response effort. It’s a great example of our continued commitment to the federal-state partnership.”

Abbott has instituted some of the recommendations in the White House document already, including mandating masks in most counties and closing bars. But the governor has resisted calls from local leaders to allow them to mandate stay-home orders.

His office did not respond to questions Friday about whether he will take the additional steps recommended by the White House.

Dr. Peter Hotez, a professor and the dean of the National School of

Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, told CNN on Friday that Texas and other Southern states now account for a significant amount of the world’s new COVID-19 cases. He called it imperative that the Trump administration develop a clear strategy going into the late summer weeks.

On Friday, Texas reported more than 10,675 new infections, the sixth time in the past 10 days that it has broken past the 10,000 mark, a Hearst Newspapers data analysis shows. The rate of people testing positive for the virus climbed to a seven-day average of 17.43 percent, following a four-day plateau.

COVID-19 hospitalizations rose by nearly 200, bringing the state to a new high of 10,632.

Hardest-hit areas include Houston, San Antonio and smaller communities in South Texas. This month, Hidalgo County, along the Mexico border, reported more deaths than all of Harris County. Dr. Ivan Melendez, Hidalgo

County’s public health authority, said it’s not uncommon for the body of a COVID-19 patient to lay on a stretcher for 10 hours before it can be removed in the overcrowded hospitals where intensive care space is running short.

“Before someone gets a bed in the COVID ICU unit, someone has to die there,” Melendez said.

Meanwhile, health officials in San Antonio and Houston have turned to refrigerated trailers to store the dead, and soldiers prepared to take over a COVID-19 wing of a Houston hospital.

An 86-person Army team of doctors, nurses and support staff was setting up a nursing station at United Memorial Medical Center and expected to begin treating up to 40 patients in the coming days.

Matt Dempsey contributed to this report, which contains material from the Associated Press.

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