



WEST AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP

P.O. Box 5722 • Austin, Texas 78763-5722

June, 2009

Organized 1973

"To preserve our neighborhood and protect it from deterioration."

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Due to Howson Library Renovations, New Meeting Location! MUNI (Lions Golf Course) Clubhouse

President's Message

By August W. "Happy" Harris III

Conflict. It is unpleasant to most of us. Others, unfortunately, thrive on conflict. It would certainly be nice if we could find a harmonious balance between wants and needs that drive conflict. To do that, everybody needs to have a clear understanding of not only what those wants and needs are but also what they mean to each party. This is why we have things like dialogue and mediation. And that is often why we need to find some form of compromise. We have some critical challenges ahead.

1) The Brackenridge Tract. Cooper, Robertson and Partners has now released some information regarding its visions for the Tract. On June 18th, we will see at least two full masterplans and hopefully the analysis that led to the designs. We have been working with both City and State officials through this process and will go into high speed once the masterplans are made available. Unfortunately, conflict is unavoidable. WANG's three overriding objectives are to minimize any potential negative impacts to West Austin related to the redevelopment of the tract, to save and protect Muny and WAYA, and advocate reasonable and environmentally sensitive redevelopment on other parts of the Tract.

In what we see as a very shrewd and calculated move, Cooper Robertson has effectively neutralized the Graduate Student Assembly and the Matthews PTA by offering a redevelopment of the Gateway site on 6th near El Arroyo and behind Matthews into what Paul Milana described as a hillside Italian town. There is no indication of what they intend to do with the Brackenridge Field Lab. At this point, the College of Natural Sciences hasn't been given any indication to the best of our knowledge as of this writing either. To make

matters worse, the "fixes," for lack of a better term, for congestion at Lake Austin Boulevard and MoPac are nothing more than a little Band-Aid with Cinderella on it. This is frankly a laughable and cheap attempt to correct a \$200,000,000 problem that will only get dramatically worse with any redevelopment for ALL of West Austin.

We do believe that redevelopment can occur on certain parts of the tract that will be beneficial for everyone and that will be sustainable to some degree. And yes my friend, you'll probably get another burger joint. (Whether you can afford to buy one there might be another story.). We also believe that there are ways to preserve Muny and WAYA. In Mr. Milana's presentation, we were shown one scenario where Muny was gone accompanied by lots of pretty artistic renderings. This gives us some hope that there is another scenario where Muny remains. It is our intent that both the Regents and the University will work with us to find a suitable and sustainable compromise on this unique tract. I, for one, am withholding all donations, meager as they might be, to the University of Texas, my alma mater, until such time as that compromise is reached.

2) Elm Terrace. To single out one development other than the Brackenridge Tract might be unfair except that it has broader implications. Back in the spring of 2007, approximately 2 acres of land at the Austin State School were acquired by a local developer via auction. There is never certainty with the status of the rest of the State School's nearly one hundred acres and that is an issue that WANG has monitored with concern for years. But this 2 acre development, we believe, sets the precedent for the rest of the tract and has broader implications in the northern and eastern parts of WANG. We made some density recommendations to the developer around the time he acquired

the land but he chose a different path. The developer's decision led to a movement by over 800 Tarrytown residents to fervently oppose his proposed project. During a protracted period, residents negotiated and mediated with the developer to reach a compromise. Of note, the compromise was approximately what WANG had suggested a year before as far as the number of units. There were, of course, a lot of other specifics that were negotiated. That compromise was making its way through to final reading at Council when the developer suddenly and surprisingly pulled out at the very last minute. Sadly, had the developer followed our recommendation when it was given, he very well might have had a completed project on the ground and sold before the real estate collapse. Perhaps it is presumptuous of me to suggest that but it is certainly worth considering. Now, two years later, the real estate market has declined, capital markets have tightened up and the developer has no approved site plans or permits. It now is very disappointing to let everybody know that this developer has chosen to fight this battle all over again by trying to get MF (Multifamily)1 zoning and going for maximum density thus wasting all the time, energy and effort of the City, the Council, and over 800 folks in West Austin.

3) Neighborhood Planning. All that being said, Neighborhood Planning began addressing the State School Tract on June 3. The recommendation coming from attendees was to define the area as Civic Use that would include schools, hospitals, fire stations etc and is consistent with its current use. That is not to say that it will always remain that way but it does set a framework for future discussions should anything ever change with the tract.

As always, we strongly urge each of you to participate and to get involved. Of note, City staff cannot keep "stakeholders" out of the meetings, whether they reside in West Austin or NOT, as they are public meetings. This means that there is the distinct possibility that those without any concern for West Austin have an equal voice. Please go to www.ci.austin.tx.us/zoning/central_west_austin.htm.

4) Bicycle Lanes on Exposition. Well, just when you thought that this contentious matter had calmed down, the City had a review of its Bicycle Masterplan and a neighborhood newspaper printed an unfortunate article. The City's Masterplan mandates that when certain pre-identified bicycle arteries are resurfaced, as was the case with Exposition, that Bicycle Only lanes be striped in each direction and that on-street parking be

prohibited. As Exposition was already one lane in each direction, itself a traffic calming measure to reduce speeding, no lane capacity was lost. Turning lanes appear to be challenging but part of that is as a result of increased through traffic created by MoPac overflow. Fortunately, there was a caveat that required City staff to work with neighborhoods on certain compromises. WANG reviewed and considered various possibilities and held an additional public input session to address this matter. In accommodating legal parking the length of Exposition on at least one side of the road, usually coinciding with institutions such as the schools and churches, we believe that an efficacious compromise was reached for the institutions and home owners.

My Conclusion: Conflict and compromise are challenges we face everyday. Right now, at this very moment in time, there is one chance, just one, to do everything right that will result in a sustainable West Austin. That is the unadulterated gravitas of what lays before us, particularly in terms of the Brackenridge Tract, the State School and Neighborhood Planning. There are a million chances to do things wrong. One to do it right. Now, more than ever in the history of West Austin and WANG, is it critical that you renew your membership and encourage friends and neighbors to join WANG. If what I have underscored above isn't enough to get you to call on your friends and write a meager \$20 check (\$10 for students and seniors) for dues, then West Austin may well be lost. Please go to our NEW website, www.WestaustinNG.com. And so the summer begins!



June Meeting Minutes

By Michael Cannatti, Secretary

These are the minutes of the West Austin Neighborhood Group Board of Directors Meeting on Monday, June 1, 2009 at the Lions Munny Clubhouse.

I. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:12 pm with the following Board members in attendance: Joseph Bennett, August Harris, Gwen Jewiss, George Edwards, Anne Keene, Susan Pascoe, Joyce Basciano, and Michael Cannatti. Mary Arnold joined shortly thereafter.

II. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the May 2009 meeting were approved

unanimously.

III. Neighbor Communications:

A. Tree Ordinance Revision: Joyce reported on the status of the proposed revisions to the City's tree ordinance, including efforts to include protections for smaller native trees that never reach the protected size requirements. The proposed revisions would require planting of more trees in new subdivisions and in parking lots of commercial projects, and would preserve large, older trees by requiring a variance to cut down "heritage trees" -- trees of certain species whose trunks are at least 24 inches wide. There was also a discussion of the recent proposal by the Parks Department to cut down 29 large trees at Barton Springs Pool, and efforts to find private funding to provide maintenance for these trees, as well as new plantings. Gwen noted that the residential tree standards need to be updated to conform to the commercial tree standards

Board Action: The Board will request that Sylvia Benini, who has taken an active role in the tree protection efforts, prepare a resolution for WANG to support.

IV. Committee Reports:

A. Zoning

(1) C15-2009-0047 -- 3302 Cherry Lane (Applicant: Norris Creath with Duval Custom Homes 373-2900 Owner: Kay Creath-Wilemon): The applicant has requested a variance to decrease the minimum lot size requirement for a duplex from 7,000 sf to 6,750 sf in an SF-3 zoning district in order to maintain and remodel a studio/garage apartment. The applicants said that a kitchen was built in the garage studio by a previous owner, creating an illegal duplex, and that the variance is requested so that the kitchen won't have to be torn out. The applicant represented that there is no intention to rent the back unit, and agreed with Joseph Bennett's proposal that the applicant agree to a restrictive covenant that prevented rental. The possibility of deed restriction prohibitions against duplexes was raised by the Board. Cannatti suggested that applicant contact the neighbors within a 500 foot distance to provide details about their proposal and to get their support for the variance request. At the time of the board meeting, there was no neighbor opposition of record, although the notices were only recently delivered. Board Action: While no action was taken at this time, the Board indicated that there could be support (non-opposition) if the applicant agreed to a restrictive covenant and there was no neighbor opposition. (Subsequent to the board meeting, it was determined that the applicant had contacted neighbors to ask for support

without providing details of their plans, and that there is neighbor opposition to an unlimited duplex variance request without having more specific information from the applicant.)

B. Communications

(1) Newsletter – The Board noted that the May newsletter is still being printed. There was no formal presentation of a recommendation on using the Peel newsletter service to deliver our newsletters to the entire neighborhood, but Susan provided a short review of the benefits and requirements, including the likelihood that WANG would not be able to solicit and run its own ads in the Peel newsletter.

(2) WANG Annual Social – August reported that planning for the Social still needs to be done, although the intention is to have the Social sometime in October, depending on conflicts with UT football games and the ACL Music Festival. Possible locations were discussed, including Muny Golf Course, Austin State School, the Hula Hut restaurant, Howson Branch Library, etc. No final decisions have been made.

C. Infrastructure

(1) Neighborhood Planning: The Future Land Use for the Austin State School property will be addressed at the Neighborhood Planning meeting on June 3rd at the Austin State School NEOS Facility. Cannatti obtained approval to circulate an email announcement for the meeting which will include information from WANG's earlier neighborhood survey on the Austin State School property. Mary Arnold noted that the planning meeting will address the legal framework for land use planning of this state-owned property, depending on whether it is maintained, leased or sold. There was also a discussion of the neighborhood's loss of affordable housing from the Brackenridge Tract if the student housing is located at the Gateway center as proposed by the Cooper Robertson and Partners (CR&P) planners. Gwen also noted that the downtown plan being proposed by ROMA is using a tactic of claiming jurisdiction outside of the downtown area in order to locate "undesirable" developments (such as affordable housing) outside of the downtown area, and recommended that neighbors contact the City Council to oppose this tactic.

(2) Brackenridge Tract Update: August noted that CR&P will be releasing two development proposals on June 18 to the UT Board of Regents concerning the Brackenridge Tract. Neighbors are urged to attend! CR&P previously revealed their proposals to restructure the intersection of MoPac and Lake Austin Boulevard to al-

low for a smoother northbound entry onto MoPac and redesigning MoPac's southbound ramp, and to combine and relocate the graduate-student housing to a redeveloped site currently occupied by Gateway Apartments, just east of MoPac on West Sixth. The Board also discussed the telephone push poll that has been recently conducted to promote the University's development desires for the tract. A number of board members noted that they had been "polled," and found the experience highly objectionable. The Board will need to work with the incoming city council members (Riley and Spellman) and Mayor Leffingwell to pursue the protection and/or purchase of the Muny Golf Course.

(3) Park Advisory Board Update: The new Parks Director, Sarah Hensley, brought Parks staff members to meet with WANG's Parks Advisory board. Sarah appears to have good energy and enthusiasm for her role.

(4) Water Issues featured at June Austin Neighborhoods Council meeting: Joyce announced that the Wednesday, June 24, 2009 Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC) meeting will feature a discussion of Austin's Water Issues by Bill Bunch, SOS Alliance and Greg Meszaros, Director, Austin Water Utility. The ANC meets at 721 Barton Springs Rd, (Austin Energy headquarters) at 7 pm in the first floor large conference room. Everyone is welcome to attend.

D. Liaison (Not discussed)

E. Membership: August proposed addressing the need to recruit and retain members by including his Presidents Message as a letter to expired members to inform them that newsletter delivery will be stopped with an explanation that "This is what you're missing, and this is why you're needed." August also stated that membership should be the focus of any new board member to fill Chris Alguire's seat if there was no willingness by any current board member to take on the project.

F. Transportation: (Not discussed)

G. Historic District: August noted that a new chair for the Historic District committee is needed, and that perhaps Leslie Ayer would be a suitable candidate.

H. Nominating: August noted that a new board member was needed to fill Chris Alguire's seat.

V. Treasurer's Report – Mike Falk reported by email that the operating account had a bal-

ance of \$ 842.20 and the oak wilt account had a balance of \$1,203.84.

VI. Old Business (Not discussed).

VII. New Business –

(1) Website Ads – Anne Keene reported that a local artist will be including a painting of August's house on our website as an advertisement for her business.

(2) Typhus Outbreak – Susan Pascoe and George Edwards discussed the recent outbreak of typhus in the West Austin area, noting that this is a treatable disease that can be serious if not treated. Additional information is posted at http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/health/news_typhus_tips.htm.

VIII. Adjournment: After announcing that the next WANG Board meeting will occur on July 6, 2009, and that a location has not been determined, the meeting was adjourned at 8:48 pm.

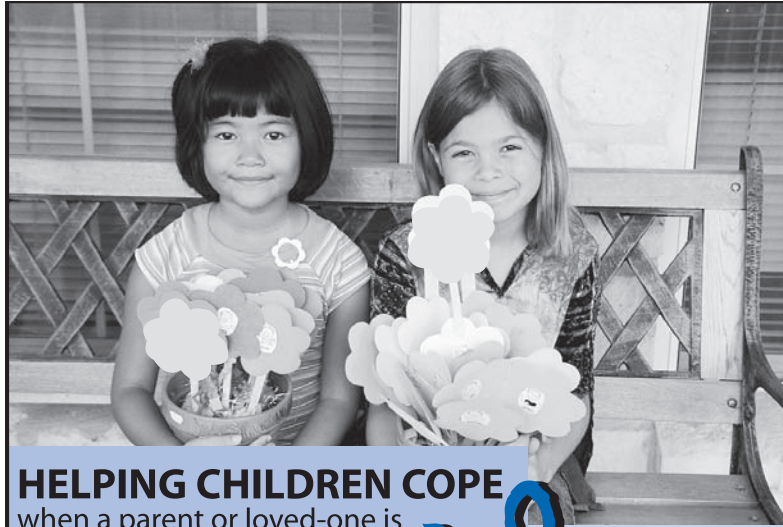
West Austin resident Kara Kockelman and her UT graduate students need you! They have designed a survey to explore Austinites' vehicle ownership & use patterns, so that they can simulate vehicle fleet holdings over time, along with energy and greenhouse gas implications, under different policy & technology scenarios. They need to obtain at least 1,000 complete responses to make solid inference in many areas. Their 15-minute survey can be accessed via <http://vehiclesurvey.engr.utexas.edu/> <<http://vehiclesurvey.engr.utexas.edu/>> & their findings can be sent your way, once complete. In today's world of rising fuel prices and climate concerns, vehicle ownership and use decisions are a key concern, for public agencies and entire communities. Please contribute and help local researchers offer better policy solutions for our public agencies, vehicle manufacturers, & others. (Note: This work is done as a public service and has received UT's Internal Review Board approval.)

Sara Madera
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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
ALL ARE WELCOME

*New meeting location will be at the MUNI
 (Lions Golf Course) Clubhouse on the first
 Monday of the month at 7PM*

West Austin Neighborhood Group
 P.O. Box 5722
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