

Annual 4th of July Parade & Picnic

By Helen Dey Valdez

It's that time again, so don your best red white and blue, decorate your bikes, trikes and motor scooters, bring a musical instrument, and join SRCC as we celebrate the 4th of July with our annual parade and potluck picnic. The parade organizers (Betty Weed, Teri Hubbeling and Cile Montgomery) will start lining people up at 10:45 at St. Edwards and Eastside Drive. It's fun and easy to participate. Get there early to get a good seat on the curb as we always have a great crowd. See the flyer inside for details. ☺

Resurrecting Norwood House

By Wolf Sittler

In 1922 Ollie Norwood built his home overlooking what is now Lady Bird Lake. He added a fine teahouse/gazebo, a state of the art greenhouse, terraced gardens and one of Austin's first geo-thermal-fed swimming pools. The classic bungalow style house quickly became one of Austin's showplace homes. Ollie went on to build the Norwood Tower (1927) in downtown Austin, said to be the world's first fully air conditioned skyscraper (15 floors!) He thereby gave the city's expansion its first big business boost.

His wife, Calie had a great grandfather, Edward Osborn LeGrand, who was the 58th signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, and one of Sam Houston's colonels at the battle of San Jacinto.

The house was sold in 1963 to Joe Small, who moved his western history magazine publishing company to the site. In the early 80's his family decided to sell the estate to investors who saw great potential in this very scenic site.

SRCC steadfastly fought these interests, successfully staving off unwelcome development. In 1985 the last owner put the property on the market. Austin's Park and Recreation Department staff saw the site's great potential and the city council authorized \$2.5 million in certificates of obligation to buy it. What was missing was a fundable plan to transform the house into a usable public facility. So it has just sat there, abandoned.

In 1988 the Women's Chamber of Commerce launched a restoration effort in conjunction with PARD and the City Council to renovate the house and transform it into a visitor's center and an institute for the economic impact of women's issues. They organized a gala fundraiser in 1992 with wide support from the business community. But dreams of turning this project into a showcase of the importance of historical preservation diminished. After moving the house back to its original site, the Chamber let the unfinished project go in 1999, and it was once again abandoned. Since then vagrants have been in and out, oblivious to the risks from asbestos exposure. Today there are holes in the roof, the ceilings are falling in, the windows are boarded up...and the City dutifully mows the lawn around the fence that surrounds it.

WHERE WE STAND TODAY

SRCC members have responded to this regrettable situation by convening the Norwood Committee., a.k.a. the Norwood Posse. These volunteers are picking up where the Chamber left off. Our first action has been to cover the house with tarps to minimize water leakage onto the fine wood floors. A neighborhood contractor has examined the house and says it is fixable. Previous estimates to PARD have been around \$1 million. The Norwood Posse firmly believes that with creative thing it can be done more affordably. PARD says they would do it, but their wish list is long, and funds are short.

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Norwood house continued.....

We're off to a good start on the outside the box thinking. The architect who worked on the Chamber effort has agreed to help us and has many files about the last renovation plan. Both Travis County Adult Probation and Austin Community Court have agreed to refer clients who are required to perform community service restitution, possibly carpenters, plumbers, etc. Numerous other contacts are being made to assemble a coalition of interested parties that, together, can bring new life to this neglected historic structure.

The evolving restoration plan places heavy emphasis on volunteer labor, donations of needed materials by local businesses, grants, and, most importantly, tax -deductible donations by those who share the vision of restoring this south Austin landmark. We will announce a non-profit foundation that will be selected to accept your donations soon. Your checks and time or resources will help save a historic treasure and invest in a public park facility. This is a great opportunity to visibly change a part of our neighborhood and contribute to the public good.

Historic District Update

By Melanie Martinez

Fighting teardowns one-by-one can't save the rich history of our community. Until we create a local historic district, it's tough to preserve individual structures, unless they attain individual Historic Landmark status. The neighbors of three 1920's workingman's bungalows on Monroe Street fought valiantly but could only save the corner house, 500 Monroe, by claiming Landmark Status because its builder, Fred Malone had lived there. Malone was a beloved Travis County Clerk who had developed the entire block as well as two others in Travis Heights. On the edge of the neighborhood, the sadly re-modeled funeral home at 1811 S. Congress, also known as The Birkner House, didn't stand a chance for adaptive re-use without a truly visionary design team at the helm; it will be demolished and replaced with a three-story Vertical Mixed Use structure.

Preliminary survey results report that 74% of structures qualify. The more detailed research required for the application for both a Local Historic District and a National Register Historic District will begin this month. Volunteers will meet at the Austin History Center for training starting in June. If you would like to help with the upcoming full survey and research, contact me Melanie@HistoricTravisHeights.org.

The historic district project general meetings will be held at Grace United Methodist Church, 205 e. Monroe on the third Tuesday of the month from 7 - 9PM. ❧

Committee Reports

The Council Listens

By Jean Mather

There is proof that a flood of e-mails, phone calls and letters do influence Council actions.

The first big effort was "Save Town Lake," but more recently we've had two successes with Council initiated ordinances.

Council Member Martinez proposed to increase the areas where billboards could be erected on certain scenic roadways. After the public's response, he withdrew that part of the ordinance and is now proposing to reconsider an earlier ordinance that reincarnated non-profitable signs to a better location at a slightly reduced size.

The second recent event was Council Member McCracken's proposed ordinance amendment to remove the protection of the compatibility provision for single family residences in the VMU. After our wonderful Danette Chimenti and others met with him, he withdrew that amendment. I'm sure that our e-mails helped also. ❧

East SRCC Report: Light Rail Proposal

By Toni House

Senator Kirk Watson noted in the American-Statesman article of 5/18/08 "How the Possible Light Rail Election Flamed Out," that key questions had to be answered before the City's light rail proposal is ready to go before the voters. The proposal was presented by Councilmember McCracken, Mayor Wynn and the ROMA Group at the 4/22/08 Mobility Workshop. Many of Sen. Watson's concerns mirrored SRCC's: lack of information on cost, financing, and operation; incomplete details on routes and selection method; no determination of the type(s) of rail proposed, and for certain segments, not even a firm commitment to rail; and no information on neighborhood impacts. (For more detail, please see SRCC letter to City Council posted on the listserve 5/7/08.)

We are fortunate that Sen. Watson insisted that specifics be provided and the proposal be thoroughly scrutinized using the "decision tree" approved by CAMPO's working group on 5/5/08. The proposed plan won't go before voters until it has been investigated and, hopefully, revised to provide definitive answers to the myriad questions raised by the initial, woefully inadequate, proposal. Heartfelt thanks to SRCC member René Barrera for his commitment, as Chair of CapMetro's Customer Satisfaction Advisory Committee ("CSAC"), to involve CapMetro in this process. ❧

Calling All Volunteers

Partner with Travis Heights Elementary

By Elizabeth McCormick

Austin Partners in Education volunteers go into a classroom on the same day and time each week to help every student maximize their possibilities. Each volunteer works with the same small group of 3-4 students, and every student in the room works with a volunteer. The classroom teacher provides support. Complete training and all lessons and materials are also provided.

Three programs are offered; choose the one that best fits your interests. With Partners in Reading, volunteers help 2nd grade students become stronger, more successful readers. *Companeros en lectura* operates in the 2nd grade bilingual class and is the Spanish-language version of Partners in Reading; volunteers need at least an intermediate level of Spanish to participate. Finally, Partners in Math helps 3rd and 4th grade students build a strong foundation in basic operations while developing confidence in math.

If you are interested in volunteering, please visit our website (www.austinpartners.com) or contact us at 637-0900 or apie@austinpartners.org. We look forward to seeing you at Travis Heights Elementary this fall! ❧

Volunteers Needed to Review Proposed City Plan

By Jean Mather

The City Council authorized an update of the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan in December, although it hasn't been obvious that they paid any attention to it lately. A Planning Commission subcommittee has had at least two hearings on the plan with staff updates. It went to the full Commission on May 27 and will be on the agenda for the City Council on June 18. The Plan as presented (beautifully) by staff is over a hundred pages long. How it will be presented and how much time will be allotted for community input may be a problem.

The environmental section has mostly minor proposed changes, but after that the suggested changes increase significantly. Greg Kiloh, in the Development section, admits that he doesn't agree with the sustainable development philosophy of the Plan. We need to set up a committee quickly to examine it section by section as it is too big a job for one person. If you are willing to volunteer, please contact me at 444-4153. ❧

Neighborhood Announcements

Make Your Yard Habitat Friendly!

By Jean Warneke

The City of Austin and National Wildlife Federation are challenging Austin neighborhoods to certify the most number of yards within their boundaries as wildlife habitats. Participating neighborhoods will have the chance to help Austin earn points towards becoming certified as Texas' first NWF certified Community Wildlife Habitat.

The **Neighborhood Habitat Challenge begins May 1 and ends Oct. 31**. The top three neighborhoods that meet the challenge criteria and certify the most number of habitats will be awarded First, Second and Third place prizes. Neighborhoods must also organize a community invasive plant removal and promote gardening for wildlife through their newsletters and websites in addition to certifying the highest number of yards as habitats during the contest period. Residents can certify their yards by visiting the National Wildlife Federation's website, www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife or by requesting a pre-paid habitat certification application (limited quantity) from the Wildlife Austin program at 327-8181 x29. For more information visit www.keeptaustinwild.com. ❧

Molly Ivins' Bench Awaits You

By Janis Tate



Thank you SRCC members, neighbors and contributors! The bench is ready for lots of sitting and ruminating! The money came in quickly for the City-prescribed \$2,000 regulation bench. A couple of us chose a location that was near Molly's home and has a view of trees in the front area of Stacy Park. The bench is located near the southeast corner of the front area of Big Stacy Park, close to the children's playscape to the south of Travis Heights Elementary School. Many thanks to Joan Singh of the Parks and Recreation Department, Terry Franz, former treasurer extraordinaire of SRCC and the Texas Observer colleagues and friends of Molly Ivins. So please go by and sit, read the memorial plaque and remember how fortunate we were to have had Molly Ivins as a neighbor. ❧

2008 - 2009 SRCC Officers and Executive Committee

In March we elected a new slate of officers to represent our community. We thank and congratulate the following individuals for their willingness to donate their time and energies towards making our neighborhoods and City better places to live and work.

Serving as Co-Presidents are Jean Mather and Joe Arriaga. Cile Montgomery is our new Vice-President and Bob Drew assumes the mantle as Treasurer. Assisting Garret Nick as Co-Secretary is Dawn Cizmar. Welcome aboard - we've already seen some incredible results from our neighborhood group this year (see *The Council Listens*).

We also want to thank our 2007 - 2008 officers for their tireless dedication to SRCC: Toni House and Gayle Goff, Co-Vice-Presidents who've done a remarkable job on the East side, Terry Franz, our tireless Treasurer (for SRCC, 4th of July and the Historic District), and Elloa Mathews, who served as Co-Secretary with Nick and as Editor of the newsletter. ❧

SRCC Officers	
Co-Presidents:	
Jean Mather	512/444-4153
Joe Arriaga	512/441-5037
Vice President:	
Cile Montgomery	512/657-7483
Treasurer:	
Bob Drew	512/445-8020
Secretaries:	
Garret Nick	512/326-7676
Dawn Cizmar	512/443-4231

Area Coordinators

Area 1	Claudette Lowe	447-1514
Area 1	Helen Dey Valdez	634-3740
Area 2	Alicia Reinmund Martinez	447-0266
Area 3a	Teri Hubbeling	447-8852
Area 3a	Bruce Barrick	444-0220
Area 3b	Brooks Kasson	444-8100
Area 3b	Kenny Hilbig	326-9120
Area 4a	Sam Martin	441-5222
Area 4b	Kris Asthalter	443-4963
Area 4b	Tim Mahoney	326-9944
Area 5	Neal Nuwash	462-9093
Area 5	Ellen Ward	851-0095
Area 6	Barbara Aybar	447-1135
Area 6	Dawn Cizmar	443-4231
Area 7	Fred Krebs	447-6442
Area 7	Helen Fleming	917-1935
Area 8	Maria Martinez	443-9784

Committee & Liaison Chairs

Austin Police	District Rep	974-4711
Blunn Creek	David Todd	416-0400
Membership	Carol Martin	441-5222
St. Edward's	Elloa Mathews	442-6986
Transportation & Public Safety	Toni House	447-8090
Zoning	Jean Mather	444-4153
Austin Neighborhood Council	Jean Warneke	443-5488
South Central Coalition	Danette Chimenti	565-0217
Cap Metro Rep	OPEN	
Newsletter	Helen Dey Valdez	326-4320
Partners in Education	Paige Fillipp	637-0988
Save Town Lake	Kenny Hilbig	326-9120
TH-FP Historic Dist	Melanie Martinez	916-8088
Austin Parks & Town		
Lake Trail Foundations	Wendy Todd	442-3130
TH Arts Trail	Margaret Adie	440-8579
Travis Park Apt & Austin Interfaith	Terry Franz	447-8768

SRCC Meetings - We normally meet the 1st Monday of every month at 7 PM at the Grace United Methodist Church, 205 E. Monroe. Check the website for details. If you want to be part of the SRCC listserv send an email to: SouthRiverAustin-subscribe@yahoo.com

South River City Citizens Membership Form

Revised May 2007

Membership Categories:

_____ Single	\$5	_____ Sustaining	\$10
_____ Family	\$7	_____ Big Bubba	\$20

Please mark areas of interest or amount of additional contribution:

_____ Parks	_____ Schools	_____ Oak Wilt
_____ July 4	_____ Historic District	_____ Newsletter
_____ Arts Trail	_____ South Congress	_____ St. Eds/Woodward

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

