

Barton Hills News

April 2008

The Publication of the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association

Presidents Message

There is really a whole lot of news to report. In some past newsletters, I've mentioned that growth and development pressures will not ignore this neighborhood; that this neighborhood will experience the pressures others have dealt with. During the last several weeks we've hosted a meeting on Mopac development and there has been an active discussion on our Yahoo! Newsgroup about possibilities on S. Lamar Blvd. I read an *Associated Press* article that reported 1 in 6 Americans moving out of state are moving to Texas, many to Austin. As a person who has lived in Florida and Tennessee (my favorite), I can say that I've met many people who fit in three categories: people who say they've been to Austin and loved it, those who say they've heard of Austin and would like to visit, and those who say they've visited Austin and would like to move here. Think about it: tolls have made it easier to live further out, and there are already discussions on removing many of the capital view corridors. If accomplished, more lots will be rezoned for development. And, BH will not be protected after the Mopac issue is resolved. I believe we'll have a big fight in the future, again.

It is hard to imagine that after April's meeting I will have completed half my term. (Yes, I consider April the mid point. I'm counting newsletters and meetings and the last are in October.) It's amazing how much front-end work has to happen. The 900-pound gorilla was this newsletter. The work, though, was always pleasant. I especially enjoyed receiving a few unused Christmas cards. I'm grateful for the kind words. I learned quickly that I cannot do everything myself. Nearly every day I have contact with the EC about things going on in the area. Every week I collect the mail and separate it and I deliver it to its proper committee member. Every second Tuesday of the month I host an EC meeting and assign work. In the first three months, this group has made the 900-pound gorilla my best friend; this group hosted a meeting on The Terrace; and this group made progress with Austin Park Police regarding supervision of the greenbelt. But it's the smaller accomplishments that make BHNA function. We had a request to put out oak wilt signs. It was a great idea; but it was also special. It was special because Ferne sent me the sign and the information that should be distributed. Indeed, it was unusual. Most requests don't come with information and rarely include an offer to help. In the end, BHNA purchased four signs and gave them to Ferne to manage.

But we still have work to do. The website is underused by the committees. Those pages need to be updated. The Terrace is unfinished business. Fires in the greenbelt are always a concern and our area's drought will increase concerns as

summer arrives. I've asked Clay to look into a past project that stalled. I've asked Troy to make recommendations on the Treasurer's files. Kimberly has valiantly championed the annual Fourth of July Parade. And, after April, we must put some effort towards that parade. Please think about it. I'm not asking now, but I will be asking. We have the resources to put it together—what we need are the volunteer hands to move the resources.

Our Kids and Neighborhood Traffic

Every once in a while I learn something new. I learn that I have more to do or more to teach or more stress to endure. Not long ago Mitchell waited outside for me to get home. He asked if we could go for a walk. Well, I noticed our neighbors had put out their trampoline and I guessed Mitchell wanted to see the kids jump. Turns out he wanted to go for a walk. But he didn't walk, he ran. He ran straight for Barton Hills Dr. I panicked because I thought he was going to cross the street. I yelled for him to stop. When we got to the other side he ran toward Barton Skyway. Again, I panicked and yelled. It seems he wants some independence. I'd rather hold his hand. He wants to be a big boy, but I want him to be my baby. He wants to run, but I want him to walk. What's unusual about this?—probably nothing. But, it occurred to me that other parents might share the same experiences. It also occurred to me that summer break is coming and neighbors should be reminded to slow down and watch for kids. As parents, we want nothing more than to hold our kids, but they're pushing. They want space. They want to run. And sometimes that takes them across the street.

April's Agenda

April's agenda will mirror the last. Food can be had at 6 for 6. The main program will feature city council candidates. Please consider the candidates carefully. A few deserve special attention. They were featured in the *Austin American Statesman* for their willingness to champion the issues of the city's police, EMS, and firefighters' unions. I remind everyone that when city budgets increase, this neighborhood pays for it. Our special guests will be Officer Visi and Chief Shaw to discuss the Greenbelt. Also, on the agenda will be Roger Temme, who will speak for The Care Communities. His group focuses on supporting people with AIDS and cancer. There will be an update on development. The rest is standard business.

As always, the pleasure is mine.
Eddie Torres
2008 BHNA President
matterhorneddie@yahoo.com

Salvation Army Pickup

The Salvation Army Rehabilitation Center will be picking up donations for their thrift stores on **Saturday May 10, from 9 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. right beside St Mark's Episcopal Church**. We need clothes for men, women, and children, furniture, appliances, electronics, and assorted household items. You can drop off your donations there at St. Mark's.

If you wish, you can call 447-2272 three or four days in advance and they can pick up at your home.

The center has 124 men in a six months alcohol and drug rehabilitation program which involves daily work and evening meetings for AA, anger management and many other counseling type meetings. It also has church twice a week and Bible study.

It serves a wide gamut of persons from Phd's, to business folks, persons off of the street and some on parole. It is a great place for those who often abuse and use the greenbelt because of their abuse of alcohol and drugs. It is located a block south of Ben White and South Congress at the rear of the thrift store. It is a wonderful facility with a softball field and basketball area.

I have been on the board over four years, so I have seen in person what a great service it performs with dedicated people. Major Street is now in charge. We open a new store in nearby Round Rock in late April and are in need of donations to fill the new building.

We love Barton Hills and have been here since 1962.

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ANC Roundup

For those who missed the monthly summaries on the listserve, here are some highlights from the last three Austin Neighborhood Council meetings.

- Council Members Sheryl Cole and Mike discussing changing the Austin City Charter to allow election of council members from single-member districts, rather than at-large as is currently done.
- PARD long-range planning for land, facilities and programs is going on now, and they are looking for public input. No date yet for meeting regarding the central parks. More info at <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/parks/events.htm>
- ANC Candidate Forum resulted in ANC endorsements for Laura Morrison for Place 4 and Jennifer Kim for Place 3. ANC did not endorse for Place 1.
- Discussion about the AISD bond package with reports from our very own Nan Clayton and Mark Yznaga who served on the Citizens Bond Advisory Committee.
- Passed along from the ANC listserve, Capital Metro is looking for people in the neighborhood to adopt bus stops. The contact person at Capital Metro for more info and applications is Alissa Schram, 369-7759 or alissa.schram@capmetro.org

Remember: The ANC meetings are always open to the public for anyone who wishes to attend. Meetings are the 4th Wednesday of each month and are usually held at the Austin Energy building on Barton Springs Road. Contact me at cl8y@yahoo.com for more information.

Troy Madras-BHNA Treasurer

I have been a homeowner in Barton Hills since February 2006. I was born and raised in Philadelphia, and spent my entire life there until moving to Texas nearly two years ago. I am married and have a 9 week old, a 2 year old, and a Basset Hound (you probably hear him howling every now and then). While in Philadelphia, which is really just a city of neighborhoods, I became very interested in civic engagement, and getting people interested and active in civic affairs. Back in 2000, I co-founded a non profit that aimed to get young people engaged in their surrounding communities: learning about politics and important city issues, planning efforts and smart design, and economic revitalization, among other activities. I'm proud to say that the group is still active even though the founding member has retired. I hope to use that organizing spirit, energy, and determination in my work with the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association. I am currently an investment banker with JPMorgan, specializing in tax exempt public finance. I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in history.



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Greenbelt Guardian Report

This has been a very active “quarter” for our Greenbelt Guardians. We’ve been working overtime to do some transformative work on our trails. Thanks to being adopted by the Austin Parks Foundation as the February “Park of the Month”, we got lots of extra help from some experienced trailwork groups to help us tackle some ambitious projects.

Work Day Reports

January 6. Members of Johnny Barnett’s “Green Corps” group just couldn’t wait for the next quarterly work day to get out and wrestle with large ligustrum trees – so a group of eight teenagers and five hardy parents went out and opened up another patch of sky by removing 100 ligustrum plants in three hours. The result is that huge Pecan and Live Oak and Sycamore trees are revealed, views across the creek are opened up, and shafts of sunlight stimulate native seeds to fill their rightful places in this beautiful hill country ecosystem.

February 2. The Austin Ridgeriders (mountain bikers) and some Hash House Harriers (runners), Hill Country Outdoors, and Greenbelt Guardians showed up in force on for a bonus work day at Gus Fruh trail. They did some heavy hauling, spreading, and packing of 8 cubic yards of road base materials, in preparation for refinishing the switch-back trail surface. They also stockpiled large stones for the creekside retaining wall under construction, and made a big dent in reducing the large ligustrum tree population on the creekside trail – they joked that they “removed a layer so we could get a better view of the layer behind it”.

We had the coordinating leadership of Charlie McCabe of Austin Parks Foundation, Charles Riou of the Austin Ridgeriders, Jerry Levenson of Central Texas Trailtamers, and members of our Greenbelt Guardian leadership group – Stan Ostrum, Tim Steckler and myself. Our COA-PARD partner John Cook and his assistant Matt inspired us, as always, with their dedication and skill. The group logged in a total of 132 composite hours of very productive sweat equity.

February 9. On our regularly scheduled quarterly work day, we had enough volunteers to support work at both Gus Fruh and Homedale trails. The Gus Fruh group put the finishing touches on the entry trail resurfacing project. They spread 12 cubic yards of decomposed granite, mixed on site with a special liquid polymer, and hard packed it with a plate packer, to assure a longer-lasting, erosion-resistant trail surface. It is beautiful. They also did some cedar rail repairs. There were 42 volunteers who contributed 138 hours of labor.

The Homedale Trail got some “TLC” also. The focus was primarily on invasives removal and ecological restoration. The understory growth much diminished due to the dense ligustrum shade, and our restoration work focuses on encouraging, protecting, and supplementing the growth of native plants, to help hold the soil near the creek banks. We also depend on the windrows created from the ligustrum trunks, branches and stems, to slow and filter the water flow from the steep cliffs into the creek, until the renewed network of native roots can take over that job again.

We staked out a Restoration Research Area, with the help of an experienced ecology researcher. We are doing an in-depth inventory of plants in that area as a baseline, and will monitor changes over time. Our GPS unit, purchased with the Stone’s grant funds, will help generate the base map. We will be looking for: reseeding or resprouting of the invasives



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removed, extent and variety of native plant growth from the existing seed bank, rate of success of the potted plants that we installed in October, and germination of harvested native seeds that we planted in February.

This "new frontier" on the greenbelt was also made safer for hikers to enjoy, by the removal of hundreds of feet of old barbed wire fencing that grew through the middle of large tree trunks and ran embedded in the soil along new pathways. We had 28 volunteers show up, with a contribution of 116 hours of productive work.

Expanded Community Engagement

Our group has also been active on other fronts. Johnny Barnett, Rosalie Russell and I attended a meeting sponsored by the Austin Parks Department to provide public input into the new Parks Master Plan being created.

The Greenbelt Guardians have also been accepted as one of forty different "stakeholders" in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP) Trail Master Plan. In November of 2007, the BCCP Coordinating Committee approved a new policy to increase, where appropriate, public access on BCP lands set aside for protection of the golden cheeked warbler and the blackcap vireo, which are endangered. There will be frequent meetings over a four to six month period.

By the time this newsletter is published, we will have participated in our fifth annual "It's My Park Day" event sponsored by the Austin Parks Foundation, when people around the city show up to help care for our public park spaces. We plan on working both trails again for this great spring work day on April 12.

Greenbelt Security Initiatives

The COA-Parks Police, APD, and Greenbelt Guardians have been in active communication during a coordinated "spring security initiative" that was created in response to serious community concerns over last year's deteriorated conditions on the greenbelt. Representatives from **the Police departments will be at our quarterly meeting to discuss the results of these initiatives and answer questions.**

Glee Ingram
Greenbelt Guardian Coordinator

B.H. Garden Club Invitation

The Barton Hills Garden Club extends an invitation to everyone in the neighborhood to join the group or just come and visit. The group meets the 4th Tuesday of each month, September through May. If interested call Bernice Billings at 442-8597.

AISD Bonds For BH Elementary

Renovate and expand adult restrooms;
Repair/replace roofing over the classroom areas;
Replace gym doors and frames;
Improve site;
Technology upgrades.

Barton Hills Neighborhood Association

Local Real Estate Information

With all of the news about dramatic increases in foreclosures and the bottoming out of the housing market, it's easy to become discouraged about our own home values and the future of our most important investment.

So far, Austin has managed to avoid the major catastrophes that many other markets, such as Florida, certain areas of California and even here in Texas, have struggled through. Although we have had some slowing during the past several months, the Austin and Barton Hills real estate markets are still relatively strong.

For all of Central Texas, expected home sales for February of 2008 dropped considerably compared with January 2008 and by about 10% compared with February of 2007. Many experts believe that this is a consequence of fewer entry-level loans being approved. Also keep in mind that any market will have trouble keeping up with the astronomical sales pace of 2006.

Anecdotally, I have noticed an upswing in homes going under contract here in Barton Hills over the past few weeks. While we will miss our friends who are leaving us, we all look forward to meeting new neighbors who will surely enrich our neighborhood.

For more information:

http://www.trulia.com/real_estate/Barton_Hills-Austin/6091/

<http://www.realestatejournal.com/toolkit/homevalues/>
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The Care Communities

The Care Communities provides practical and compassionate support, through care teams, for people living with serious illness, particularly AIDS and cancer. Our vision is a caring community where no one will face a serious illness alone. The care teams (4 – 7 volunteers) provide things like light housekeeping, shopping, meal preparation, yard work, child support and pet care. We ask each volunteer to provide 4 hours a month for their care partner (the one seriously ill). Roger Temme, Outreach Coordinator, will attend the April 22 meeting and share about The Care Communities. For more information, check out their website – www.thecarecommunities.org.



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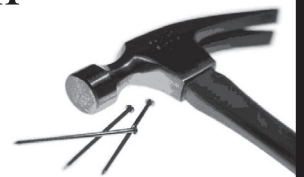
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Neighborhood Plan on Hold

On February 25, we received official notification from Greg Guernsey, the director of the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department, that the South Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning (SLCNP) process, which includes the Zilker, Barton Hills, Barton View, Galindo and South Lamar Neighborhoods, has been stopped after a three-year effort. When and if the process will be revived is unclear at this point.

As the SLCNP plan process ran into difficulties more than a year ago, the City of Austin brought in the UT Law School Dispute Resolution Center to mediate in the hopes of restarting the plan; Barton Hills representatives participated in this process. The basic concern that brought the process to a halt was the undefined role of city staff which could act as stakeholders and could submit an alternate recommendation to the Planning Commission or City Council even if there was a consensus among the participants.

When the neighborhood planning process started in the late 90s, many neighborhood activists in Austin hoped that neighborhood plans would implement a vision developed by all stakeholders that would be binding on all parties. However, neighborhoods with approved neighborhood plans soon experienced that their plans were not really binding for new development. Developers still are at liberty to request rezoning or variances, staff members are at liberty to disregard approved neighborhood plans, and neighborhoods—who had made concessions in the planning process in the belief that their plan would give them better protections—still find themselves fighting off unwanted development at city hall. The realization that the planning process itself has institutionalized flaws made it easier for the South Lamar neighborhoods to walk away from the process.

Where do we go from here? On March 19, the Planning Committee Subcommittee discussed how to proceed with neighborhood planning in the South Lamar Corridor (Nan Clayton, Melissa Hawthorne, and Peter Hess attending). The outcome of this process is uncertain—possible outcomes range from Planning Commission and City Council redefining the role of staff in this process to putting neighborhood planning on hold until the comprehensive plan is in place (which may be years away). As we have few non-residential properties in our area, the lack of a neighborhood plan will impact us less than the other South Lamar neighborhoods. We will live as we have with the existing zoning and deed restrictions in place—which was the neighborhood plan vision back when all our homes were built. The small commercial portions or multi-family areas in our neighborhood will be subject to their zoning and watershed regulations (including the redevelopment ordinance) along with the new VMU standards along South Lamar—should the Committee on Area Development's recommendations be approved by City Council.

Nan Clayton, Melissa Hawthorne, Peter Hess

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