

# Barton Hills News

BARTON HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

## How to fire harden your home

By Melissa Hawthorne



After the Bastrop fire, I took in a couple. They didn't know for days whether their home survived. They had themselves and their dogs. They were OK. They had a house and a guesthouse. Their home survived even though the windows literally melted on one side. The fire melted a concrete sidewalk behind their house and the guesthouse was gone. Looking at pictures of the fire, so tall and jumping divided highways, is very eye opening. Embers can fly and on windy days travel quite far.

### Here is a simple list of how to harden your home:

- Start by making sure your roof and gutters are clear of flammable vegetation like leaves and pine needles.
- Remove dry grasses from around your home.
- Keep desired vegetation well-irrigated.
- Clear flammable materials from your deck and below as well. This includes wood storage, brooms and easily ignitable patio furniture.
- Enclose and seal the area under your deck from wind-driven embers.
- Move the woodpile and lidded garbage cans away from the house.
- Install fine wire mesh screen over roof, eave and foundation vents.
- Inspect chimney and install a spark-arresting mesh screen.
- Relocate propane tanks and other flammable materials to at least 30 feet or more from the house.
- Retrofit windows, doors, siding and decking with fire-resistant products, as time and budget allow. A replacement double pane, metal – not vinyl – window can make the difference between survival and loss.



### NEXT MEETING

April 29th • 6 - 9pm

Please join us at St. Mark's Church (corner of Barton Skyway and Barton Hills Drive). All are welcome!

**Social Hour:** 6pm. pizza, salad and pasta from Rockin' Tomato \$7.



**Neighborhood Meeting:** 7pm-9pm



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## Barton Hills News

The Barton Hills Neighborhood Association newsletter is published quarterly and supported by advertisers. It's distributed to homes in the Barton Hills neighborhood of Austin, Texas. For more about membership and neighborhood affairs, contact the appropriate person below.

### 2013 Executive Committee

#### President

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#### Neighborhood Watch

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### Neighborhood Outreach Position Available

### Barton Hills Community Park

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*Newsletter printed on 100% recycled paper.*

## President's Message

By Tom Nuckols  
BHNA President

### Neighbors,

Austin's city charter requires city development and zoning regulations to conform to the recently adopted Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. Through a process dubbed "CodeNext," the city is rewriting the city code to do just that. What does this mean for Barton Hills?

Imagine Austin recognizes the need to provide housing for the estimated 750,000 additional folks who'll live in Austin by 2043. It says we should absorb this growth by allowing dense redevelopment in and along designated "transit corridors" and "town centers" and in other areas the city designates for growth in "small area plans," such as neighborhood plans. We see this type of dense redevelopment in the new apartments along South Lamar, which is a transit corridor.

Imagine Austin also says that not all areas of the city will be redeveloped. Barton Hills doesn't contain a transit corridor, center, or an area designated for redevelopment. So it's fair to conclude that Barton Hills is one of the areas that won't be redeveloped, but will remain a neighborhood predominated by the single-family homes with spacious yards full of trees that currently exist.

Imagine Austin doesn't say Barton Hills should change, so CodeNext would be wrong to change the current development and zoning regulations governing Barton Hills. CodeNext should carry forward into the new city code all the regulations that have kept neighborhoods like Barton Hills the special places we love, rather starting with a blank slate.

Not all share that view. The Real Estate Council of Austin (RECA) has issued a CodeNext position paper. Some of its proposals advance Imagine Austin by fostering denser development where Imagine Austin calls for it, but others are unsettling. It states "We should not redline the current code, but instead start with a blank slate." Among the city code provisions RECA would outright erase are the McMansion ordinance, the Heritage Tree ordinance, provisions restricting alcohol sales in neighborhoods, and provisions that allow neighborhoods to appeal certain city staff decisions. It also hints at amending city code provisions that Imagine Austin says to leave intact, including changes to "compatibility" setbacks and height limits that require dense developments to be compatible with adjoining single-family neighborhoods.

RECA's justification for both its legitimate and questionable proposals is that Austin's affordability problems can only be solved by greenlighting massive increases in density everywhere in the city. But affordability is a multifaceted issue, so that's simplistic. At a recent Austin Neighborhoods Council meeting, Mandy De Mayo of Housing Works Austin, an affordable housing non-profit, stated that "Density in and of itself cannot provide affordability." Those who advocate nothing more than "throwing density at the problem" are not advancing a realistic solution.

*(President's Message, continued on page 11)*



Neighborhood Watch

## Call For Neighborhood Watch Patrol Volunteers

By John L. Luther  
Director, Barton Hills Neighborhood Watch Program

### Want to become part of the solution to reducing property related criminal activity in Barton Hills?

For just one hour a week of your time you can do just that. Volunteers are needed to fill some open daytime shifts on weekdays Monday thru Friday. Each patrol is only for one hour and on the day you select to participate. Patrol Volunteers are retired folks, stay at home parents, work from home professionals and residents of Barton Hills of all kinds that want to give a little something back to the neighborhood.

Neighbors who volunteer for this important position are given orientation and training prior to patrolling. Volunteers provide their own cell phones. Magnetic signs, neighborhood maps and reporting material is provided. Ride-alongs with experienced patrol volunteers are included in the training program.

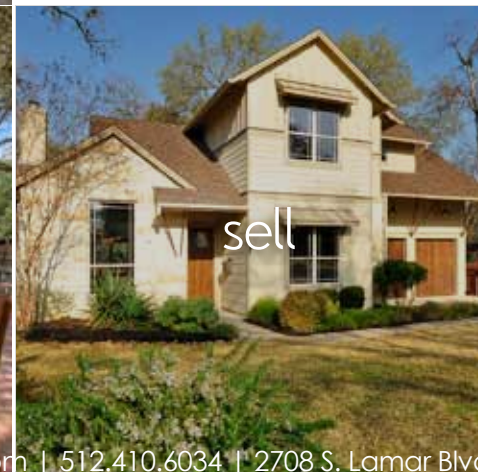
Neighborhood Watch Patrol is important to our ongoing program of neighborhood crime reduction, easy to participate and greatly appreciated by the Austin Police Department and all your neighbors in Barton Hills.

**Contact John Luther at [jluther@austin.rr.com](mailto:jluther@austin.rr.com) to learn more about Patrol or to sign up for orientation and training.**



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Update

## Barton Hills Community Park

by Roy O. Smithers  
Executive Committee Chair

The next phase of park development is completed. The unsightly limestone rock chunks along the hillside at the edge of the fence on Barton Hills Dr. are gone. Beautiful green grass is coming up where the work was done. Several weekends ago, you may have seen an army of folks assisting Jack Scott, whose Eagle Scout project was to complete a new trail for pedestrian access to the park with the assistance of the contractor. The trail extends from the sidewalk along Barton Hills Dr. and runs along the face of the hill to the running track loop. There are also low limestone walls to prevent erosion caused by large rain events. And, what is most noticeable are the “Blazier Blocks” (large limestone rectangular blocks) placed along Barton Hills Drive.

The Park Playscape Committee is in high gear to observe, review and recommend playground equipment to enhance what is already in place. About a month ago, the Committee visited six local playscapes. Children of the Committee members had the best time playing on playscapes they had never seen before. After each location the children were

quizzed about what they thought – the best and worst. It was an excellent method to observe play equipment from different manufacturers and obtain feedback from actual users. Then the Committee chair and several Executive Committee members met with City of Austin Parks and Recreation representatives to obtain City requirements and suggestions. We are hoping that selection, approval and purchase can be accomplished in time so that installation will occur this summer.

The Executive Committee would like specially to thank Blairfield Realty, Barton Hills Neighborhood Association and the Barton Hills Elementary PTA for their generous donations to improve the Park.

The Park Committee truly appreciates all of the past support of Barton Hills Elementary School and Barton Hills residents and hopes that what we have accomplished so far meets with your approval.



Update

# Greenbelt Guardians

By Glee Ingram

Our work on removing invasives from the Greenbelt has moved quite slowly this past year, due to the annual restrictions from March through September generated by the Endangered Species Act, and then due to an informal PARD ban for the rest of the year because of concerns about potential fire hazards in the greenbelt during this prolonged drought.

This past fall, the Program Director of Austin Parks Foundation and I met with the staff member in the City’s Watershed Protection Department in charge of the implementation planning for the City’s recently adopted Invasive Species Management Mandate. They in turn met with the City Parks Director in charge of Zilker Park and the Barton Creek Greenbelt, along with the Austin Fire Department’s Director of Wildlands Fire Management. The goal was to find a balanced approach to managing for ecological health and water quality improvement in and along the greenbelt, while using diverse fire-wise slash management strategies suggested by the Austin Fire Department.

To facilitate this collaboration, a group of stakeholders with various management interests in the Barton Creek Greenbelt, did an assessment walk, taking GPS coordinates to establish a GIS map designating targeted areas for invasives removal (Ligustrum, Nandina, Chinaberry and others). This map will serve as a master work plan for contracted Texas Conservation Corps crews.

This assessment walk was done by representatives of the Greenbelt Guardians, PARD staff members assigned to the Barton Creek Greenbelt, a representative of the Watershed Protection Department, and the Texas Conservation Corps. It will be reviewed by staff from the Wildlands Fire Department, for their recommendations on the slash management strategies most appropriate for the various site conditions. We are all in agreement that this narrow strip of creek and wildlands,

in the midst of our city, must serve many valuable functions, and collaboration and cooperation are needed.

The Greenbelt Guardians used some of our grant monies in 2013 to finish work that was begun two years ago on the grounds south and southwest of Barton Springs Pool. The boundaries are the south side fence, the drainage creek that runs near the Barton Springs parking lot, the old trestle bridge remnant area near the shallow side of Barton Springs Pool, and the area at the base of the Apartment buildings along Barton Springs Drive. This area was heavily infested with invasive growth, and now has a new chance for ecological health. It was also an area that “housed” illegal campers, where emptied stolen wallets were found. It will now be more open for native growth to re-establish itself, and less desirable as a homesteading area.





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BOTH STORES OPEN DAILY: 7:30 AM – 11PM



# Austin Real Estate

by Ryan Rodenbeck  
Broker/owner of Spyglass Realty



As we end the first quarter of the year, national speculation is that some areas of the country show that sales are down. This could be due to the onslaught of winter storms during the first quarter of the year, experts say. This has caused the Fed to re-consider their tapering of QE3, also known as quantitative easement.

Sales are expected to grow through the summer as new developments come online. Outside of Austin, most of the new development neighborhoods are being erected in Leander, Cedar Park, Georgetown and many parts of Hays County.

At this time, the February numbers, which were just released, show median home prices up 10% over the year before, standing at \$225,000 in January. The same data shows average home prices are up as well, coming in at \$288,650 or 11%.

In area 7, which includes Barton Hills and Zilker, the median home price is up a whopping 16.8% this year, landing at \$550,000. The “average price” is down, presumably because the data is showing less properties and the homes that sold were down. Both the average and the median price per square foot show a decrease in price. The data for this area shows that in February 2013 of last year there were 8 properties sold. A very small sampling of data from this year shows there

were 20 properties sold in the same time span of 2014. So are values down in area 7? There is also the “pocket listing” issue. Many agents are electing to try to sell properties off market for various reasons. This is fine, but if it is not entered into MLS, your neighbors will not realize the gain, through appraisal, when they list the home.

For example, If the comparable properties only sold for \$640,000 and you believe that someone will buy your home for \$700,000, you can list your home for \$700,000 and find a ready, willing and able buyer who will pay the asking price, but if this buyer is getting a loan, and the appraisal comes out at \$640,000, the bank will only lend to that amount. This means that the only way to circumvent this is to get a cash buyer or to negotiate the financing contingency out of the contract. We’ve done this a few times on the latter, but only if there are several offers, and the winning buyer needs to be able to bring in cash over and above the down payment. Ideally, Austin real estate agents should put “pocket listings” into MLS after they close in order for subsequent sales to appreciate properly.

As the summer season approaches, be prepared to see multiple offers throughout on reasonably priced properties. Also, be prepared to see interest rates rise as we enter the fourth quarter of the year and the Fed’s QE3 tapers.

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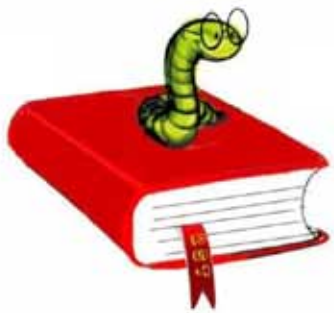
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(President's Message, continued from page 2)

Density has benefits, but it also has detriments. Yet another proposal afloat is for CodeNext to eliminate front and rear yard setbacks on lots zoned SF-3. The single-family home next to you with its spacious front and rear yards full of trees is, quite possibly, on a lot zoned SF-3. The city code allows duplexes to be built on SF-3 lots. If you live next to an SF-3 lot, consider that eliminating these setbacks would allow a developer to buy your neighbor's existing single-family home and treat it as a "blank slate" by replacing it and its yards full of trees with the impervious cover of a more-profitable mega-duplex that is built right up to the boundary of your lot.

Imagine Austin doesn't mandate rewriting the city code to foster widespread loss of yards and trees in neighborhoods like Barton Hills in favor of increased density and impervious cover, with its attendant water quality, flooding, and traffic problems. Fortunately, the people leading the CodeNext process for the city have been very responsive to citizen concerns so far, so there's no need to grab up torches and pitchforks to storm the castle. But the CodeNext process is far from over, so there is a need to become vigilant and involved in the CodeNext process for the long haul.

Regards,  
Tom



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Visit [groups.yahoo.com/group/barton\\_hills/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/barton_hills/) for more information about how to sign up.

## 2014 MEMBERSHIP FORM

Fill out this form to join or renew your membership in the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association. Annual dues are \$10 per household, payable when you join (for a new membership) or every January (for renewal).

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