

# Barton Hills News

BARTON HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



## NEXT MEETING

**New location!**

**Umlauf Sculpture Garden**

605 Robert E Lee Rd.

**April 28th • 5 - 9 pm**

- 5pm** Garden open for touring by neighbors
- 6pm** Dinner and social hour
- 7pm** BHNA meeting convenes
- 9pm** BHNA meeting adjourns

**NOTE:** To make it more convenient for BHNA members to attend our meetings, BHNA will provide child care at this meeting. Please watch the BHNA List Serve for details.



"This old grist mill was built and operated by G. T. Rabb in 1871 and here the first ice in Austin was manufactured. Rabb sent to France for the ice-making machinery. The mill was located near the old Scout hut at Barton Springs, and a spring and dam furnished the power for the plant." C00079b Austin History Center.

## A History of Barton Hills

By Dick Kallerman, updated by Phoebe Allen, January 2015

The U.S.G.S. topographic map was dated 1955. I pored over it, looking for signs of habitation east of Barton Creek, where Barton Hills is now. I was surprised to find that there was nary a house between Rabb Road and the Creek, except for an enclave of a dozen or so very special houses built by A.D. Stenger in the "Contemporary" style. This style, popular for a while after the war and owing a lot to Frank Lloyd Wright's "Prairie" style, is characterized by gently sloping, sheltering roofs, clerestory windows, and a merging of indoors and out with decks that extend into the treetops. Strolling today along Rundell and Airole Way, you realize that homes here in Barton Hills are some of Austin's architectural wonders.

*Continued on page 8*



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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.

## 2015 Executive Committee

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# President's Message

By Tom Nuckols  
BHNA President

Neighbors,

As discussed at the last BHNA meeting, here's a draft BHNA bylaw amendment regarding online voting. This same language was posted it on the 2/25 list serve for comment. No one responded negatively to it.

**"V.6. In lieu of voting at a meeting, the Executive Committee may authorize voting to be conducted online, in which case the President shall appoint an online election administrator, who shall report to the Executive Committee and conduct the election under its direction. To be binding on the Association, at least five percent of the total membership of the Association, based on the paid membership as of the first General Meeting of the fiscal year, must participate in the election, and an affirmative vote of more than fifty (50) percent of members participating in the election is required. The privilege of voting shall be limited to members who are current in their dues and those who have joined the Association by paying dues at least ten days prior to the election."**

The proposed bylaw amendment will be on the agenda for the next BHNA meeting for discussion and a vote.

Regards,

Tom Nuckols  
BHNA President



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Update

Greenbelt Guardians

By Glee Ingram

On Saturday, March 7, the Greenbelt Guardians held a very productive volunteer work day at the Gus Fruh entry to the greenbelt. We had 60 volunteers show up to help us do drainage improvements and trail repair work, invasive plant removal, maintenance of the entry area to the trail, and trash removal. Good fortune provided a rare clear weather day in the midst of this long rainy spell, and spirits were high as volunteers spread throughout the trail to do their good work.

We had our competent BHNA volunteer leaders on board to guide the volunteers in their work, and were supported with breakfast tacos provided by BHNA funds. This was our first work session with staff from the city's Park Rangers Department, which has been newly assigned to the management of

the Barton Creek Greenbelt. John Cook, our former Parks Department partner who retired last year, came as a volunteer to help coordinate the work with our new city partners.

Our work day was part of a citywide It's My Park Day event promoted by the Austin Parks Foundation, which in 2014 brought over three thousand volunteers to parks across the city to help with parks maintenance projects, contributing over 10,000 hours. That volunteer work was valued at a quarter of a million dollars for Austin's parks. That amount of labor would be the equivalent of 5 park maintenance employees working full-time for a whole year. This 2015 volunteer work day was anticipated to contribute an even higher value.

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Property Tax 101

Increasing Property Taxes are a major factor in making a living in central Austin almost unaffordable for many of us. As Realtors and residents in this area for over 30 years, we have personally seen people sell their homes and move solely because they could no longer afford their property taxes. A large portion of governmental services are funded by property taxes and nobody should be asked to pay more than their fair share. This is what propelled us into volunteering with Austinites For Fair Taxes (in partnership with Real Values for Texas), a grass roots group of neighbors united around the concept of adequately funding necessary public services in a way that does not place a disproportionate burden on low-to-middle income persons. On February 24, we put on a workshop where there were presentations by speakers Ann Kitchen (City Council), Marya Crigler (Travis County Appraisal Board) and Dick Lavine (Center for Public Policy Priorities).

What we have learned is that there are several large loopholes in the property tax code that enable large commercial property owners to have their properties taxed at far below their fair market values. For example, even if a commercial property actually sells for \$100 mil, if that property owner can show that it is similar to another commercial property that is only appraised for \$60 mil, current state law requires that the taxable value be \$60 mil. Homeowners are encouraged to provide sales information (typically obtained from Realtors) to TCAD to support their claims about their home’s value. As a result TCAD is extremely well informed about sales data for residential properties. This is not the case for larger commercial properties. This results in an unfair burden on residential properties. There are laws being proposed to close some of these loopholes. Just last week Senator Rodney Ellis from Houston proposed a bill to tighten those loopholes and we were among several home owners at the legislature to support this. Kirk Watson has also proposed several bills that would help alleviate some of these inequities.



Our new Mayor has proposed a 20% City homestead exemption. As a representative of Austinites for Fair Taxes, Peach presented the City Council with some of our ideas of changes that are needed. Mayor Adler agreed that a homestead exemption based on a fixed dollar amount, rather than as a percentage of home value, would proportionally help the lower valued homestead properties more, but this is not currently allowed by state law. There are bills being proposed to allow this option. Another proposal would lower the current 10% annual increase in homestead taxable value to 5%.

In addition, the cost of government needs scrutiny. Austin is far and away the fastest growing mid-sized city in the US. Studies have shown that as a city grows beyond a certain point, for each new person that is added the overall governmental cost per capita increases. When it comes to city size there is no savings in scale - just the opposite! In spite of that, millions are spent by the city in the form of taxpayer incentives, density bonus programs, waivers, and variances. What attracts businesses to Austin is our “Culture of Creativity” not incentives. Additionally, a report by city staff showed that in 2013 the city spent \$23.9 million for special events and collected only \$13.2 million in fees and reimbursements - a loss of over \$10 million just on special events! Keeping a close eye on budgetary spending has many people suggesting what is called “zero based budgeting” whereby annual budgets are dealt with item by item to see if specific monetary benefits are realized with each dollar spent.

The property tax system in place is very complex with many interlocking pieces and there is no simple solution to bring our tax bills down and make Austin more affordable. Hopefully, some of the inequities in the property tax code will be removed and our elected officials can be more judicious about how they manage our money. We all need to be part of the solution as we move ahead.

Update

Barton Hills Community Park

by Roy O. Smithers and Melanie Gantt  
Executive Committee Chair and Chair Playscape Committee

The mural project for the park is well on the way. Mina Kumar states that the mural tiles are coming along well. They have prepared several of the focal pieces of the first panel. In addition, they have created hundreds of pieces of sky and grass which were completed by members of the community and students at O. Henry Middle School. Workshops have been held with elementary and middle school students and girls from Girl Scout Troop 773. The following are tentative additional mural work dates: Sunday, March 8th at 1-3 pm (BHE 4th & 5th graders), for trim and glazing; then Saturday, March 14th at 10:00-12:00 am (volunteer group) for glazing and tree making; then, Sunday, March 29th at 1-3 pm (BHE 6th graders), for glazing and trim making.

The park committee has met with neighborhood resident Tara Pitt who will spearhead an attempt to have sidewalks built on the west side of Barton Hills Elementary adjacent to Homedale. Specifically, Homedale Drive from Barton Hills Drive to just north of the Homedale Green Belt entrance. Tara is coordinating her efforts with Councilmember Ann Kitchen’s office and the Barton Hills Elementary leadership and Advisory Council. Apparently the City is more likely to take action if this roadway is designated as a “school zone”. Kati Achtermann, Principal of Barton Hills, Sarah Price and Melissa Abel (the Advisory Council co-chairs) have already begun the process by sending a written request to the Austin Transportation Department, Managing Engineer requesting the “school zone” designation.

The park committee will soon review proposals to purchase and install exercise equipment in the park. Melanie Gantt and her committee are currently reviewing equipment to propose to and be approved by the park committee and Austin Parks & Rec. If you would like to make your suggestions of what exercise equipment you would like to see in the park, please send it to Melanie at [melanie@ganttaviation.com](mailto:melanie@ganttaviation.com).

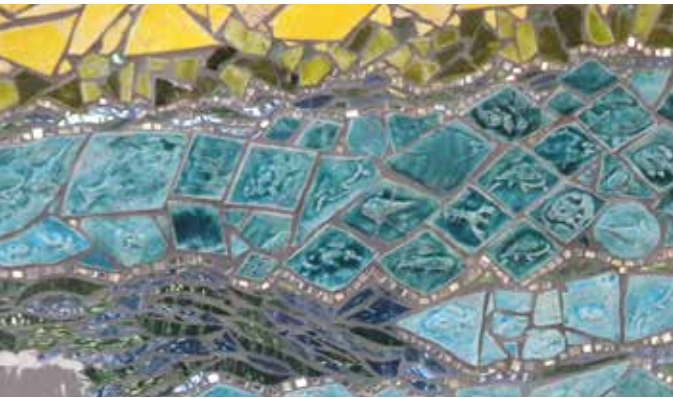
The committee has met with a cistern supplier and has provided school site and roof plans to the company to evaluate and suggest a cistern or cisterns for the park. The purpose would be

to irrigate the gardens of Barton Hills Elementary and the park playing fields. We plan to seek funding from the Austin Parks Foundation for this project.

I purchased three plastic trash cans for the park and placed them at strategic locations around the park—at the backstop on the upper field, at the picnic table on the lower field and adjacent to the slab. I also motivated Parks & Rec to move two concrete enclosed trash cans from the hillside and place them—one near the playscape and the second, adjacent to the swings. The trash on the ground seems to be less than it used to be, possibly because the trash cans are in more convenient locations.

Finally, the committee now has a sketch of a proposal to install “blaizer” blocks along the hillside below the playscape. It was provided by Committee member, Eric Miller. The proposal need to be refined by an engineer and then presented to Parks & Rec for approval. The purpose is to beautify and transform the hillside into seating for performances which could be held on the slab.

As always, the Committee truly appreciates all of the support of Barton Hills Elementary School folks, City of Austin Parks and Recreation, the Barton Hills PTA and every Barton Hills resident. Please continue to support this effort in the future. If you are interested in keeping up with the latest Committee discussions, the minutes of Committee meetings can be obtained by sending me an email at [rorsmith@aol.com](mailto:rorsmith@aol.com).





A Stenger home at 312 Ridgewood Rd.

A.D. Stenger (1920-2002) was born in Dallas. He built about 100 homes in Austin, most in Barton Hills and Rollingwood. He started out in the late 1940s on Arthur Lane, named after his father, the first Arthur Dallas Stenger, who was also an architect. Stenger Jr. had served as a specialist in the Navy's Seabees in the South Pacific during WWII. He then studied architecture at UT, working for Bert Giesecke, Hugo Kuehne, and Max Brooks while a student.

Stenger's goal was to build affordable yet unique homes for returning WWII veterans. He was used to cramped quarters in the Navy and was trying to stick to a tight budget, so criticism of his too-small kitchens, bathrooms and closets never bothered him.

He built one at a time rather than in mass, buying pockets of land in Barton Hills off Robert E. Lee in the A.D. Stenger Addition (comprised of Arthur Lane, Rundell Place and Airole Way), South Lund Park (along Robert E. Lee Road, Bluebonnet Lane, and Lund, Dexter and Treadwell Streets), and on Rabb

Road and Paramount Avenue. After he bought a lot, he'd find a buyer, then design and build the house, usually without much input from the buyer. He built a home in Rollingwood for Cactus Pryor and offered a house on Airole Way at no cost to John Henry Faulk after Faulk's CBS career ended in 1957, a victim of McCarthyism. Sue and Frank McBee (Tracor founder) were also notable clients. Stenger's daughter still lives in a house built by her father on Treadwell.

Stenger was an avid outdoorsman. He traveled to Alaska in 1955 in search of the grand Kodiak Bear and later returned on fishing trips. He crossed the Arctic Circle from Norway in 1960 to hunt bear, and in 1962 accompanied a science expedition as a video photographer, tracking down Soviet submarines for the CIA during the Cuban missile crisis. Together with buddies John Henry Faulk, Russell Lee, Ed Small and Cactus Pryor, he enjoyed exploits roping everything from bears to sea lions and relishing his love of the outdoors.

**More details can be found at [stenger.rileytriggs.com](http://stenger.rileytriggs.com)**

While the oldest homes in the neighborhood date back to the late 1940s, there was a surge in growth from 1956 through the 1970s and into the 1980s, with over 8,000 homes in the area today. Barton Hills was featured in Austin's 1955 Parade of Homes<sup>1</sup> as "the world's largest air conditioned subdivision." Few of the Stenger houses had air conditioning. Beginning in that year, Barton Hills was platted as a subdivision in six sections by S.R. Sheppard, Builders Development Corporation, and several others. Barton Hills eventually had 1,585 lots planned on its 535 acres (0.84 square miles).

Gerard Kinney, who grew up on Kinney Avenue in the Zilker neighborhood, told me that he used to hunt rabbits in Barton Hills when he was a child. Squirrels, rabbits, coons and foxes were plentiful long before his time. But what about its earlier history?

The banks of the Colorado River have long been a lively place. Dinosaur footprints 99 million years old can be found in Zilker Park, and artifacts indicate the presence of Native American camps near Barton Springs some 11,000 years ago. So you might say that ours is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Central Texas.

The Spanish established three missions near Barton Springs in 1730-31, but soon abandoned them. In 1826 what is now Barton Hills was a part of a large tract of land on "Spring Creek" in the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas. Milam's Colony was granted to Empresario Benjamin R. Milam to settle 300 families between the Colorado and Guadalupe Rivers. This is the same "Old Ben" Milam who led the Texan assault on San Antonio against Mexican regulars in December of 1835 and who died in that bloody house-to-house fighting. In 1835, a league of Milam's tract at the mouth of Spring Creek - the land from which Barton Hills would eventually be carved - was granted to Henry P. Hill.

The year after the 1836 Texas Revolution, William "Uncle Billy" Barton homesteaded the land near the springs. A colorful character, he named the main springs after his daughters, Parthenia, Eliza, and Zenobia. He ran a gristmill and kept two baby bison to amuse visitors.

Barton Springs have been an attraction from the earliest days. One who came to visit, the story goes, was Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee. The road named after him, skirting the Springs, was a common path for soldiers on their way to the western forts after Texas was annexed.

In 1860 John Rabb (1798-1861), one of Stephen F. Austin's Old Three Hundred colonists who had seen action at the Battle of San Jacinto, purchased the land originally patented by Barton, built a log cabin on the south bank of Barton Springs and began



The Rabb House, located near the south entry of Barton Springs.  
PICH 02419 Austin History Center

establishing a herd of cattle. He died the next year, but his wife, Mary Crownover Rabb<sup>2</sup> (1805-1882), lived another 20 years. She, together with her youngest son, hired workmen to build a two-story limestone rock home on a bluff of the south bank of Barton Creek in 1867, near today's south entry for the Barton Springs Pool. According to a news clipping, Mrs. Rabb's brand was a Bow and Arrow, and "after her husband's death, 'The Cattle Queen of Texas' (as she was called) devoted her time to her nine children and to her cattle." Mrs. Rabb continued to raise stock on the Rabb Ranch (now Barton Hills) until her death in 1882.

Gail Texas Rabb (1847-1929), the youngest of the Rabb's nine children, built and operated a gristmill in 1871 at the Old Mill Spring, and leased land and water for a flourmill that operated until a fire in 1886, when the mill dam and water wheel flume was conveyed back to the Rabbs. Rabb also bought machinery from France for making ice, the first manufactured in Austin<sup>3</sup>. He apparently leased both the mill and the ice manufacturing business to Michael Paggi, who arrived in Austin by 1870. The mill was the first business venture south of the Colorado River. It provided employment and instigated settlement south of the river. Rabb or Paggi also built a dam out of logs and a merry-go-round, and rented swimsuits, initially to men only.

According to an 1871 newspaper account, "The indefatigable Paggi has been making improvements in his stand near the post-office, where he is prepared to furnish cooling draughts to refresh the inner man. His bathing houses at Barton's Springs are now completed, and he is ready to receive ladies and gentlemen. He provides the bathing suits, and other necessities. He has also, on the way to Austin, what is called a Mexican fandango, or a set of revolving horses and carriages, which will be accompanied with a fine organ, made expressly for it, and chock full of grind."<sup>4</sup>

*continued on page 10*

A History of Barton Hills continued from page 9

In 1875 you could take the steamboat Sunbeam for an excursion from Austin, then a nearby city, to Barton Springs for a round-trip ticket price of 50 cents. Paggi also operated the Belle of Austin, an excursion boat from town that came up the creek.

By the turn of the century, the Rabbs owned quite a lot of the original Henry P. Hill league south of Barton Springs. Reserving a tract for the Rabb residence, Gail Rabb sold the land around the springs in 1907 to Andrew J. Zilker, who deeded 35 acres of it to the City of Austin as a park in 1917 and another 330 adjoining acres in 1931, on the condition that the City support vocational education in Austin schools.

In 1922, architect Hugo Kuehne designed the early Pavilion/Bathhouse, which featured a dance hall on the second floor, and in 1929 designed the Caretaker's Cottage and a Windmill Concession; the pavilion and Windmill Concession were later demolished after heavy floods. Few know that riding stables and a riding arena were located on the north side of the Springs.


In 1955 Mayor Tom Miller led the City in purchasing 29 acres of the 535 acre Rabb Ranch from Builders Development Corporation, giving the City control of nearly 4,000 feet of Barton Creek. The Rabb House, overlooking the City's Pavilion and dancehall from the south hilltop, burned the next year.

Some of the defining natural features of Barton Hills were swept away on the development drawing board: a waterfall and natural pool lie buried in the shadows of the bridge on Barton Hills Drive, and our highest hill (named Sugarloaf?) with its commanding views should have been a park. Popular with young families and professionals, the neighborhood's strongest attractions today include the adjacent Barton Creek Greenbelt Nature Preserve and Barton Springs Pool, Zilker Park and Botanical Garden, Zilker Hillside Theater, the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum, and Barton Hills Elementary School.

In the 1972 presidential election, Barton Hills was described as a political bellwether - a statistical microcosm of the national population (i.e. "as goes Maine...") - and was briefly famous as such. As one neighbor said, "We're so average, we're unaverage."

Today, what was once a developer's dream on the outskirts of Austin is now a centrally located, mature and cohesive neighborhood - a good place to live and raise a family.

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Footnotes for "A History of Barton Hills"

<sup>1</sup> The first Parade of Homes in Austin was held in 1953 on Westfield Drive. Rae Dell in Barton Hills was featured in 1955, and Cedarview "Lane" in 1956.

<sup>2</sup> John Rabb was born in Pennsylvania; Mary Crownover was born in North Carolina. They married in Arkansas before moving to Texas. G.T. Rabb was named for Gail Borden (of condensed milk fame), who was a friend of John Rabb. G.T. married Isabella Tharp in 1870.

<sup>3</sup> The ice plant was said to have been located near the old Scout Hut at Barton Springs. There are two Scout Huts southeast of Barton Springs indicated on a 1934 plan of Zilker Park, one of which is quite close to the Old Mill Spring, also known as Zenobia Spring or Sunken Garden. The ice plant was likely located here, at the site of the gristmill.

<sup>4</sup> Daily State Journal [Austin, Texas] 11 August 1876.

Our Million Dollar Neighborhood?

By Wendy Papasan

As someone who's lived in the neighborhood for more than 15 years, I've seen the area ebb and flow. I know that those of you who have lived in the neighborhood for 50+ years are chuckling and saying if only you'd seen it in the 60s...

As everyone knows, our home prices continue to rise as Austin continues to grow. Traffic has a had a major impact on housing as many people who once would have gladly paid the same price to live in a larger home in Circle C, now will pay a premium to get downtown without having to wait an hour on Mopac are choosing our neighborhood instead.

Since January 1, 2015, eight homes have sold in Barton Hills with an average price point of \$626,500 and a median price of \$597,500. This is an average price per square foot of \$319,10. Median days on market is just under one month at 28 days and the average is 39 days.

Just for fun, I pulled statistics from 1st quarter in 2005, 10 years ago. Our average price point was \$163.45, which means that home prices in Barton Hills have effectively doubled in a decade.

Interestingly, there are three houses priced at \$1 million or above right now for sale in Barton Hills. A quick search of the MLS shows that two homes sold over a \$1 million in 2014 and only three sold in all the years prior!

For those of you curious about the Greenview on Barton Creek condos (3600 S. Lamar Blvd.) being built next to Red's Porch, those are on sale for about \$350/sq ft. A one bedroom, one bathroom at 915 sq ft will run you about \$315,000. There are 78 units for sale and they have views of the greenbelt and the downtown skyline.

Generally, interest rates are still low, so it's still a good time to buy and with only two months of inventory city-wide, it's definitely still a great time to sell.



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## 2015 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).

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Other 18+ members of your household:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Please send this form along with your annual dues to:

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Make checks payable to BHNA. You can pay dues online through PayPal at <http://bartonhills.org/about/membership/>.  
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