

Barton Hills News

BARTON HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Update

Barton Hills Community Park

by Roy O. Smithers and Melanie Gantt

Executive Committee Chair and Chair Playscape Committee



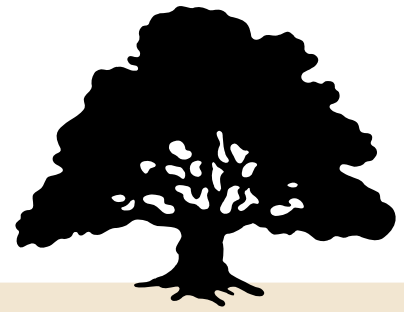
The Barton Hills Neighborhood Assn. has also approved providing \$5,500 for the project and the Barton Hills Community Park Executive Committee has approved another \$1,000. Officially, the Neighborhood Assn. has signed a contract with the City to obtain the funds.

And, the BHNA Board has approved the mural committee's recommendations of the artists, Wanda Montemayor and Ana Borne, to create and supervise the construction with Rachel Noffke. Ana Borne is a mosaic teacher at Laguna Gloria and Wanda Montemayor is a counselor at O. Henry Middle School. Wanda helped create and complete the super big and incredible Deep Eddy mural. All artists are members of the Austin Mosaic Guild. The first phase of the mural is scheduled for completion in May, 2015 and the final phase is scheduled for completion May, 2016. The Committee appreciates Beatriz Mejia, Mina Kumar and Rachel Noffke for all the great work they did to put this project "on the road."

Now that the playscape renovation is completed, the playground committee chaired by Melanie Gantt will tackle selecting, purchasing and installing exercise equipment in the park. Melanie and the committee would like your suggestions, so if you have a suggestion of what exercise equipment you would like to see in the park, please send them to Melanie at melanie@ganttaviation.com.

The Committee has long struggled with how to irrigate the playing fields of the park. Currently, we are grappling with a proposal to install cisterns to collect the water runoff from the roof of Barton Hills Elementary. The water could then be used to irrigate the park. This is a long range project which will require a much coordination and funds, but the seeds have been planted—the question is can we get them watered.

Continued on page 7



NEXT MEETING

January 27th • 6 - 9pm

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

Social Hour: 6pm. pizza, salad & 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.

2014 Executive Committee

President

Tom Nuckols
tnuckols@austin.rr.com
(512) 462-2329

Vice President

Carlisle Hamling
carlislehamling@gmail.com

Treasurer

David Poisson
dpoisson@swbell.net

Secretary (Recording)

Kathleen Schneeman
kathleen.schneeman@gmail.com

Community Partnership Coordinator

Wendy Papasan
wpapasan@gmail.com

Newsletter design

Scott Stricker
scott@shoehorndesign.com

Austin Neighborhoods Council Representative

Lauren Hadley

Committee Chairs

Committee on Area Development

Peter Hess
phess@mail.utexas.edu

Greenbelt Guardians

Glee Ingram
gleeful@earthlink.net

Neighborhood Watch

John Luther
jluther@austin.rr.com

Emergency Preparedness

Susan Donaldson
skdon@mindspring.com

Neighborhood Outreach

Carol Mann
carol.mann13@gmail.com
(512) 695-3057

Barton Hills Community Park

Roy Smithers
rsmith@yahoo.com

<http://bartonhills.org>

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President's Message

By Tom Nuckols
BHNA President

Neighbors,

Is it time to develop a neighborhood plan (NP) for Barton Hills? A neighborhood benefits from City Council adopting an NP because it refines the City's broad, general, citywide zoning regulations to address the detailed individual needs and special circumstances of that particular neighborhood.

Most central city neighborhoods are protected by existing NPs. The glaring exceptions are the Barton Hills, Zilker, South Lamar, and Dawson neighborhoods. Why? Years ago, the City tried to develop NPs for these neighborhoods. At some point, the prevailing sentiment among enough neighborhood folks was that the process created more risks than benefits for them, so the City abandoned the process.

That was then, this is now.

What's changed? City Council recently adopted the Imagine Austin (IA) comprehensive plan. IA calls for City zoning regulations to be rewritten. But there's an important legal requirement: The City Charter requires that these new zoning regulations be consistent with IA, and IA incorporates all existing NPs.

What does that mean? It means that a neighborhood with an existing NP addressing its individual needs and special circumstances has certain protections from changes to the City's broad, general, citywide zoning regulations.

On the other hand, Barton Hills not having an existing NP means the upcoming changes to the City's broad, general, citywide zoning regulations could well impact Barton Hills in ways that many of us don't like and never anticipated when we made the largest investment decision most folks ever make by deciding to buy a home here.

In my view, there's absolutely no upside to the status quo of having no NP for Barton Hills. And there is no downside by not pursuing an NP. It is my hope that several Barton Hills residents make this issue a priority for them in 2015.

Regards,
Tom Nuckols
BHNA President



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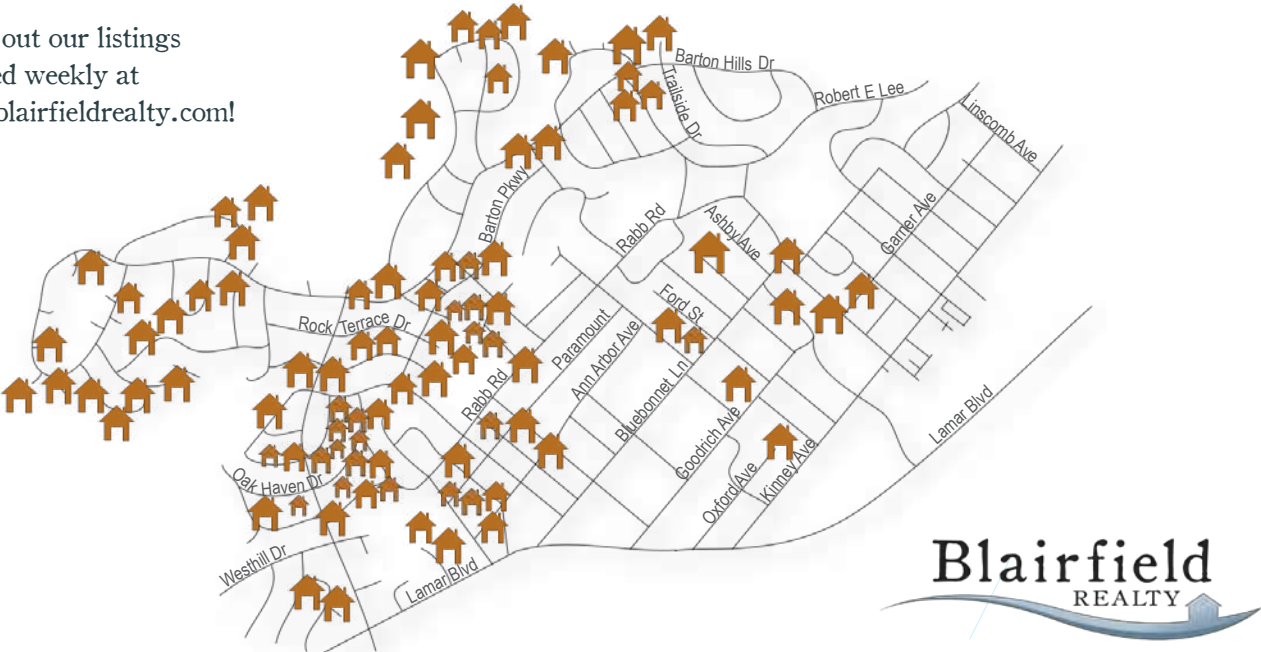
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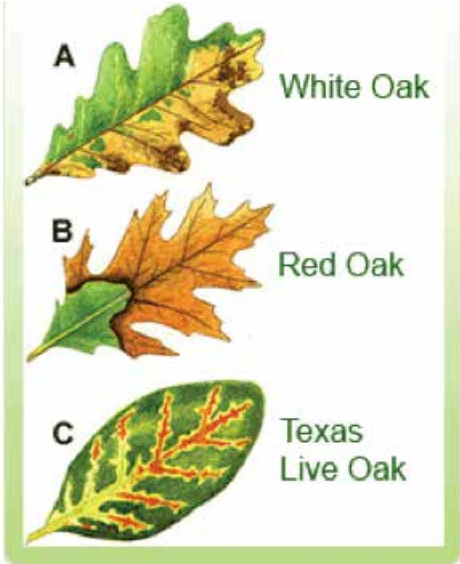
Oak Wilt and Pruning

Oak wilt, one of the most destructive tree diseases in the United States, is killing oak trees in central Texas at epidemic proportions. Oak wilt is an infectious disease caused by the fungus *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, which invades and disables the water-conducting system in susceptible trees. All oaks (*Quercus* spp.) are susceptible to oak wilt to some degree, but some species are affected more than others.

Most of the tree mortality results from tree-to-tree spread of the pathogen through interconnected or grafted root systems, once an oak wilt center becomes established. New infection centers begin when beetles carry oak wilt fungal spores from infected red oaks to fresh, open wounds on healthy oaks. Wounds include any damage caused by wind, hail, vehicles, construction, squirrels, birds or pruning. Research has shown that both oak wilt fungal mats on infected red oaks and insects that carry oak wilt spores are most prevalent in the spring. This disease can attack any of the oak species although some oaks appear to have some resistance. In live oaks and members of the red oak family, oak wilt is often a lethal problem. Fungicides have been found which can suppress the disease, but to date there is no real "cure" for the problem. There are several active oak wilt centers within the Barton Hills boundaries.

Prevent New Infections

- Cut and dispose of diseased red oaks immediately. Debris from diseased red oaks should be immediately chipped, burned or buried
- Avoid wounding oak trees, including pruning, from February through June.
- Sterilize/sanitize all pruning equipment between trees and paint all wounds and fresh stumps regardless of season.
- Handle oak firewood cautiously, burn all firewood before spring, and never store unseasoned oak wood from infected trees near healthy oaks.
- Cover unseasoned firewood (from infection centers and unknown origins) with clear plastic and bury the edges of the plastic.



There may be times when it is not prudent to avoid pruning or wounding of oaks during the spring. Some reasons to prune might include:

- To accommodate public safety concerns such as hazardous limbs, traffic visibility or emergency utility line clearance.
- To repair damaged limbs (from storms or other anomalies)
- To remove limbs rubbing on a building or rubbing on other branches, and to raise low limbs over a street.
- Dead branch removal where live tissue is not exposed.

Generally pruning for other reasons (general tree health, non-safety related clearance or thinning, etc.) should be conducted before February 1 or after June 30.

Regardless of the reasons or time of year, proper pruning techniques should be used. These techniques include making proper pruning cuts and avoiding injurious practices such as topping or excessive crown thinning. If you are uncertain about any of this information, you should consult with a Texas Oak Wilt Certified arborist, ISA Certified Arborist, or an oak wilt specialist from a City of Austin.

For information regarding the Oak Wilt Suppression Program, call 512-974-1881 or <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/oak-wilt-suppression>

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Austin Real Estate

by Ryan Rodenbeck



The year has come to a close and it's been one heck of a ride. We started out very strong and finished in the "meh" category, especially the over \$500,000 price point in Austin.

So what's the synopsis of the 2014 Austin real estate report? It's good. If you've been receiving my newsletter for a few months now, you've probably heard me say this a few times. Midyear, what we referred to as the "drunken sailor approach" to buying property, abruptly came to an end. Just to give an example of what happened before then was this: On any given street, property A came on the market and sold at a high price, sometimes \$10,000 or more above list price. Multiple offers ensued and, given the right circumstances, buyers agreed to bring money to close over and above what the property appraised for (and bring additional money over and above their initial down payment). Property B (which is a close match to property A) sees the sales price and lists \$10,000 above what property A sold for. And with buyers lining up to purchase property, this vicious cycle continued. Well, around June we started to see these buyers "sober" up.

Why did this happen? Not exactly sure, but I would say it's a combination of things. The national real estate market started slipping and more rental units became available which gave buyers a viable alternative to buying. There were probably some fears of what would happen after the November elections. Whatever the cause, I don't think it was a bad thing. Days on market for prime properties (desirable areas, in good condition and presented well to the marketplace) went from selling in days to selling in weeks. Inventory increased from two months to some areas having 5 to 6 month's worth of inventory, which is generally considered to be a "healthy market".


So that brings us to the next question: what happens next? Well, the headlines below would indicate that things will continue and have continued since 2011, but the truth is (in my opinion) that we had a slight lull in 2014. And I believe that things will pick up in 2015, albeit at a slightly slower pace. Property values in November are higher than ever, but that is for the median home value. The struggles we're seeing are in the over \$500,000 category (And I say "struggle" using it comparatively to the months preceding June

2014). Comparing those price-points to 2008 and 2009, we still look very good, but sellers are going to have to be smarter when they price their homes and present them to the market. It's no longer "anything goes".

What I mean by this (and again, this is just one real estate expert's opinion), is that instead of 10-12% appreciation, we will probably see an appreciation level of closer to 7-10%.

So what can you do to take advantage of this market and when should you do it? If you are a buyer, think about getting into contract before March. That's when the largest amount of pending listings have been seen in the past 6 years. You should have a thought out plan for submitting an offer on properties that are in multiple offer situations. Our brokerage, for instance, has put together a 7 point plan that differs drastically to combat the variables involved in the Texas purchase contract, all while still allowing you to conduct your due diligence. It's super aggressive as far as terms go, and that allows us to work the sellers on price. We ask up front that we be told what we need to bring to make the deal work. This method is really productive and it's not for every situation, but if you find that perfect home, then you are going to want to hear how we control most of the variables that sellers consider when in a multiple offer situation. The point is, if you're in a multiple offer situation; go in with a well thought out plan to make an offer that will differ from the other offers. Price is not the only term. It's the most important, but not the only one. Sellers want security.

If you are a seller, try to get your property on the market either the second week of January or the third week of February through the end of March. The third week of February through the end of March is for obvious reasons mentioned above. Sellers, you are going to want to be tactful when selecting price this coming year. There is a real sweet spot for pricing your property that we have found produces multiple offers, combined with other home selling techniques. This is especially true in the \$500,000 and up price range, which is where we have seen the greatest amount of inventory increases in the past few months.




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Continued from the front page

Finally, the Committee is in the discussion stages of what to do with the hillside below the playscape. We hope to beautify and transform the hillside into seating for performances that could be held on the slab. Of course, this will be a slow moving project since the City will have to approve whatever we decide.

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.



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Visit groups.yahoo.com/group/barton_hills/ for more information about how to sign up.

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: _____

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