



May
June
2016

Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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The 2016 General Meeting: A Lot of Information

On the evening of April 5th the annual General Meeting of Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association, in accordance with bylaws, was held at St. Mark UMC. It was attended by well over 50 residents, and nearly 60 counting visiting speakers and city and school representatives. Refreshments were actively attended to.

Based on audience participation alone it was a good meeting, producing (of course) more questions than answers to the issues most frequently raised by us residents. In contrast to our usual format the meeting was dedicated to presentations and discussions addressing those issues, with the exception of the election of one new board member, Clay Chip Smith, by voice vote. While Clay was unable to be present because of illness, he had previously agreed to serve if elected. No current board

members were up for re-election this year.

President Robert Meadows gave introductions to the various speakers and brief descriptions of the issues they were there to discuss, in a generally informal format.

To start the process the new principal of Walnut Creek Elementary, **Ms. Dinorah Bores**, was presented by **Mr. Mycah Arellano**, long-time "volunteer liason" at the school. These two enthusiastically presented their intention to produce and follow a new vision for the school. Mr. Arellano talked about the ways the school is trying to partner with parents, and especially to solicit more volunteers to act as mentors for students. For example, they may try to re-institute the "SMORES" program through which several WCN residents volunteered until a couple of years ago. Ms. Bores emphasized their intention to recruit volunteers to work with individual students to improve performance of them in particular and the school in general. Watch for announcements about tours of the school and "Coffee With the Principal" which will allow us to get to know the school and some administrators. They have been experimenting with schedules for both, trying to determine which work best jointly for the school, volunteers, and interested residents.

Demographics of the approximately 630 students at the school are about 80% Hispanic, 10% African American, with Asian and White accounting for all but about 1.5% of the rest. Almost 90% of students are classified "economically disadvantaged". Students met the 2015 standard for the STAAR tests (see <https://www.austinisd.org/schools/walnutcreek>).

Following the school discussions, **Jill Leberknight** noted that this year's home appraisals from TCAD are being received, and warned of "sticker shock" when we open them. This is going to be "an ugly year" because of the prices at which (especially "flipped") homes in the 'hood have been selling recently, with a new maximum occurring regularly. To strategize to minimize the increases in our taxes, Jill has established 24 May at Walnut Creek Elementary for her annual workshop on property taxes (Santorini became overcrowded last year). Note that the protest form must be sent to TCAD by **EOB May 31st**.

Dorsey Twidwell was chosen by District 7 to serve on the Austin Flood Mitigation Task Force last year. Motivated by the Memorial Day floods, this commission was formed to consider flooding issues over all the city and eventually to submit a report with recommendations for actions to mitigate the effects we ourselves have so dramatically experienced with the heavy rains recently. Dorsey described the process and status of all the city's forces addressing flooding issues. The FMTF members first had to become educated about issues and approaches. This has required (and is still requiring) many hours of education (a discouraging fact learned in the process: If the city addressed all the cases already before it with funding it currently has, it would take about 85 years to complete them). The group holds public meetings at which residents can sign up to make statements. Dorsey strongly urges us to consider doing so, and is providing FMTF meeting schedules through our social media to help us participate. The information also will be posted to our website at WCNAnews.com.



Dorsey Twidwell

Dorsey is also a primary contact for the North Walnut Creek Trail project, which someday will run the 10-foot wide concrete "commuter trail" into the neighborhood along Walnut Creek in Walnut Bluffs Trailhead. The start of work on our section, Phase 2, has been anticipated for a couple of years now, but appears to be sliding away about as fast as the date approaches. Because of massive complications, Phase 1 had to be broken into Phase 1A and 1B, and completion of 1B is still months away. Our section can't start until Phase I is completed, so only design work is being done at this point. The good news is that the parking lot off Oakbrook shown at one time on the plan has gone away. The bad news is the means to safely bridge the creek and a way to get out onto the IH35 access road sidewalk near the Walnut Creek bridge currently don't have solutions.



Mycah Arellano & Dinorah Bores

(Continued on next Page)

Francoise Luca is the vice president of Gracywoods Neighborhood Association, and was present to endorse the attendance of our residents at the Flood Mitigation Task Force open meetings and to provide more detail about "travails with the trail". She also gave information about attempts to move the off-leash dog park further from the creek (and trail) and other considerations about the Riparian Area meetings and efforts under Parks and Recreation (two of the Riparian Areas are chronically flooding).

The most contentious neighborhood issue - obvious from watching the neighborhood social media - was saved for last: Cut-through traffic in WCN, especially on Covington, Scurry and Caddo. **Theresa Jones** gave a brief slide and video presentation to illustrate the problem, showing cars stacked up in front of her house on Covington in the afternoon rush hour. She also showed the array of methods the city has applied for slowing speeds on residential streets. Extreme speeding late at night on Hornsby - frequently involving alcohol or other drugs - was brought up later by residents on that street. To provide help with respect to these and other traffic issues, **Dipti Borkar-Desai** (a city traffic engineer) and **Laura Dierenfield** (Active Transportation Program) were present. Dipti described the consideration the city gives to alleviating most traffic issues, but conceded that because city streets are public property their use by the public is guaranteed and the city can/will do little to restrict drivers on them. On the other hand, safety is a critical city priority so they will act to make streets safer, and hence the use of speed bumps and similar "traffic calming" features. As Theresa pointed out, our streets are generally too narrow for most of these, so our options are severely limited. Preventing turning off the IH35 access road onto Covington during rush hours, adding stop signs, and posting lower speed limits were discussed, along with changing light synchronization at IH35 and Braker to facilitate right turns during rush hours. Dipti stated that she would look into these issues, some of which involve the highway department and APD.

For any of these issues, Dipti emphasized the need to fill out city forms describing the issue and requesting action, as all city consideration starts with such. For requesting relief from traffic problems on a particular street at least one resident living on the street must submit paperwork, but only one application is needed to instigate city action to collect relevant data. Requests for speed limit change or other signage can be made with the same paperwork. Any resident can submit a request; Go to <http://austintexas.gov/page/application-process>.

Other representatives present included Michael Guadini from the CC District 7 office and Chad Crager, head of the Neighborhood Partnering Program. Chad enthusiastically solicited requests for this program, which can provide city funding when neighborhoods define a project and provide matching sweat equity, funding, or both.

McBee Elementary "Paints" Their Wall

Amplify Austin Day is a twenty-four hour period established to help generate support for local artists and non-profits. Austin's "I Live Here, I Give Here" program (<http://ilivehereigivehere.org/amplify-austin/>) is the overarching organization, and Amplify represents a major part of its activities. The concept is pretty loose, but basically allows any Austinite who is an artist or represents a nonprofit - or wants to support same - to take advantage of the PR capabilities of the city to raise money to support their activities. Our most local version of this was a project to produce a mural on the long retaining wall in front of McBee Elementary School. Ethan Azarian, a long-time Austin artist, offered to mentor kids from McBee to produce the 200-foot-long work, comprising about 18 distinct panels representing aspects of school, work and environment. Supported and sponsored by North Austin Creates, Austin Creative Alliance and individuals it was a great act of love by Ethan and a fun and educational exercise for the kids. And of course a terrific beautifying addition to our surrounding neighborhoods.



McBee Kids Working on the Mural From www.ethanazarian.net

The picture below was taken using the panoramic mode of a camera, which represents what it looks like standing in a particular spot on the median. To really appreciate it you have to look toward McBee as you pass by (passengers only for cars, please) or walk by on the sidewalks on either side of Braker. It's worth the effort, and it brings positive energy to what once was just dead space.

Congratulations to Ethan and the kids! Very well done indeed! (And Ethan also thanks Mary Rudig, Principal Maggie De LaRosa, Librarian Heather Stephens, and art teacher Megan Zaner.)



The Fifth Fourth is Coming!

Monday the 4th of July will usher in the annual Walnut Creek Neighborhood Independence Day Parade and Potluck Picnic, the fifth since it was started by Kay and Joel Klumpp in 2012. This year we will meet at the home of Christian and Luzdary Ninaud at 11809 Oakwood after 10:00 a.m. to "organize" the parade and set up for the festivities afterward. Christian and Luzdary have graciously offered to host the process, which means we will be starting and ending the parade on Oakwood rather than at the Klumpps on Indianhead as in previous years. As has been the usual procedure, sometime after 11:00 a.m. a signal will be given to start the parade, which probably will travel around the "peninsula" in the same direction as in prior years (the uphill part isn't so steep going counter-clockwise). Afterward a potluck picnic will be enjoyed. Bring anything you'd like to eat or drink, or nothing at all: We've never had too little for all to eat! Tables will be set up and some seating will be available, but to be sure you have a place to sit you might bring your own chair(s).

The parade usually takes about 30 minutes, after which the shady front yard will become a park for the potluck picnic lunch and meet/greet/schmooze-fest with our neighbors and visitors. (By the way, while nothing says "Independence" like hotdogs and watermelon, the potluck spread is always amazing!) All ages and sizes are welcome, whether you want to parade or not: Bystanders along the route to cheer the marchers are especially welcome! If you would like to help in any way, please contact Christian at 512 971-7628, mtbrider007@yahoo.com or Pat Pitt at 512 837-6620, s.pitt@earthlink.net.



C'mon, le's go! Two of last year's participants getting a late start.

Agent Jill's Top 10 County Appraisal Protesting Tips

By Jill Leberknight Walnut Creek Real Estate Expert

Below are my top protest tips with updates from the lessons we learned in 2014-2015. I continue to encourage everyone to protest during the current market-value growth period.

Let's First Begin by KNOWING THE NUMBERS

- Average home prices in WCN increased 19% this past appraisal period which is more than double the Austin average.
- Our highest sales price increased by 6.5%
- 44% increase in professional flips from the previous year.
- Highest Sales price was \$330,000
- Highest price per square foot \$200
- Lowest sold comp was \$175,000

THE TIPS

1. **Make sure you have the appropriate home exemptions filed properly with the county office.** Filing for these in person is useful to ensure that they are completed properly. To learn more visit http://www.traviscad.org/faq_exemptions.html
2. **Protest in-person at an informal hearing as opposed to the online e-protest.** If you e-protest and are not satisfied with the result the next step is automatically the formal ARB committee hearing. There is no informal step between those two options. **The deadline for filing a protest is May 31st.**
3. Make sure you request and obtain an evidence packet that shows you the exact comps the county is using for your property. You will need to add this request in writing on the back of your appraisal form. Having this evidence packet will allow you to more carefully protest your value based on the exact comps the county is using for your home.
4. **NEW INFORMATION!** Make sure you obtain **FULL REPORTS WITH PHOTOS** of the comparable sold properties that you wish to use as evidence for your protest. The county will no longer accept CMA's without photos.
5. Make sure you know and provide documentation of your homes' condition.
6. Make sure you obtain estimates from licensed professionals for systems or structures that are in need of repair. The county has, on occasion, deducted these repairs from appraisals.
7. Make sure you make every effort to attend the informal hearing that the county assigns you as they are no longer allowing requests for rescheduling. They will allow you to appoint a representative. If you miss the informal your next step will be the ARB Formal Hearing.
8. Make sure you know which homes were professional remodels or flips in your community for the previous appraisal year. I will help provide this information.
9. Be kind, courteous, and calm during the hearing. This is a classic you get "more bees with honey than vinegar" kind of approach with the TCAD protest.

Property Protest Support

The Agent Jill Team believes our role as Realtors is to serve and educate our Austin communities during this difficult time of growth. As an ex-teacher I believe that information, facts, and knowledge are power so I have made a commitment to arm my neighbors with these tools to navigate our annual County Appraisal Process. My team offers free workshops, office hours, and individual guidance.

If you need help with property protest please fill out the request at: <http://www.agentjill.com/tax-protest-support/>

Summer Office Hours Detailed at: <http://www.agentjill.com/event-calendar/>

Sign Up for Summer Office Hour Appointments at: <http://www.agentjill.com/tcad-office-hour-appointments>

Updates on Relevant City Projects

Walnut Park Apartment Complex and Walnut Park Crossing (i.e., Cut-Through Traffic)

Actual construction work on this project across Walnut Creek has not yet started, primarily (we are told) because the site plan has not yet been accepted by the city (biggest issue seems to be drainage, as the requirements were changed recently). The site has largely been cleared and the structures to prevent erosion during construction set up, so work can hit the ground running when the site plan is approved. Of primary interest to us is the road - Walnut Park Crossing - which will provide access to these apartments from both IH35 and Lamar, thereby providing a route from Park 35, TCEQ, Limestone Canyon Apartments and other businesses on IH35 to North Lamar. It is expected that this access will have a salutary effect on cut-through traffic to and from these places during rush hours. The developer is hoping for completion of the road by the end of the year.

North Walnut Creek Trail Phase II: Walnut Bluffs "Commuter" Trail

This is summarized in the article describing the WCNA General Meeting at the top of the newsletter. It looks as if changes being made in engineering are moving in the right direction, but the actual start time has moved so far it's no longer accurately predictable.

Flooding / Drainage

Again, a brief summary is given in the General Meeting article. Basically, there is a huge backlog of projects chasing a very limited budget. No significant changes are expected until the Flood Mitigation Task Force produces its recommendations, and there is no mandate requiring implementation even then. It's likely that the only way to get relief for our drainage problems under city auspices is to get to the top of the city's priority list. In the meantime our best hope is to try to coordinate action among ourselves to make sure a "fix" for one resident doesn't aggravate another's problems. Note there is a rebate for related landscaping on the next page.

CodeNext

When this program to rewrite the city's land development code was initiated it was expected to be at or near completion by now, but controversy and change of scope have slowed progress and increased estimated cost. One of the prime objectives of the effort was to establish rules which would encourage and facilitate making the city more "dense", with the intent to reduce the rate of increase of sprawl and concomitant traffic and perhaps support more affordable housing, particularly near city center. Of course we neighborhoods have been very suspicious of this program, so the process has been slowed to allow more citizen input as it proceeds. Also "mobility" has been added to the scope with expected increases in time and cost. As a result the expected date for city approval of the code (not implementation) is now late 2017, and no really specific codes have been generated.

The "controversy" primarily is a difference in the way "old Austinites" (in the form of neighborhood organizations) and younger residents view "quality (or way) of life". And perhaps expectedly, we old residents have a certain lack of trust in the city government concerning this issue. Our "input" so far has been through pictures and words describing what we like or dislike about our 'hoods submitted to the staff working on the project (we and several other neighborhoods were considered as one 'hood for this purpose). Of course the large lots and large, old trees distinguish our neighborhoods from any new ones and make us worry about what "densification" will mean to us. At this point it looks as if a "bipartisan" set of rules is about as likely here as in the U.S. Congress, so nobody will be surprised if the project slips much further than anticipated at this point.

Travis County Appraisal Protest Workshop

Tue, May 24, 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Walnut Creek Elementary School Cafeteria
401 West Braker Lane, Austin, TX 78753

Learn how and when to protest, along with how to determine a fair market appraisal value for your home. The Agent Jill Team has been serving the North Austin area since 2005, and this annual event provides community-specific real estate advice combined with neighborhood sharing tips, tricks, & stories that have led to a tradition of success through community efforts.

Traffic Disruptions Coming Soon!

- The Texas Department of Transportation will resurface the MoPac frontage roads from Parmer Lane to Waters Park Road between May and August.
- TxDOT will bid a contract to resurface the I-35 main lanes from Wells Branch Parkway to Rundberg Lane in November.
- On the positive side, tolls for semis on Toll Road 130 have been greatly reduced to measure the effect on IH35. It is hoped but not yet reported that the density of trucks on IH35 through Austin will be significantly reduced.

Meter Parking in Austin: Use Your Phone!

Users now can pay for any on-street, metered parking spots through a smartphone application called ParkX. The application stores license plate and payment information.

ParkX will alert users about 5 minutes before their parking meter expires, allowing the driver to add more time or move the vehicle. It also will send regular parking expense reports, sometimes useful for business or tax purposes.

ParkX will add a \$0.25 convenience fee to each transaction.

For a limited time, the city is running a promotion for the program which allows new users to enter the code "AUSTIN" in the wallet section of the ParkX app to receive an hour of free parking.

Alternatively users may call 512-838-3874 or text the word "Park" to the same number and follow prompts to pay for parking.

Free download from Google Play for Android or iTunes for Apple phones.

Rebates For Landscaping: Change Shape and Save

Homeowners and schools may receive up to \$500 (\$0.30/sq. foot -- 100 sq. foot min.) for installing landscape features such as berms, terraces, swales, rain gardens, porous pavement, and infiltration trenches that direct and retain rainwater on the property.

These rainscapes help slow or prevent runoff and can reduce or eliminate the need for additional water for irrigation, saving customers on their water and wastewater bills. They can also help teach students about water conservation and water quality protection.

Also, installing a rainwater collection system, such as a tank or cistern, along with a rainscape, can help you make the most of this cheap, high-quality source of water and may qualify for a [Rainwater Harvesting Rebate](#).

Help the butterflies and become a hero

The National Wildlife Federation is giving out 50,000 Butterfly Hero Garden Starter Packets, and all your family has to do is take a picture of yourself making the sign-language sign for butterfly. Submit the photo at <http://www.nwf.org/Butterfly-Heroes/Pledge.aspx> by June 1 and you'll get the free kit. The kit comes with seeds for native milkweed or a flowering nectar plant and a Ranger Rick Wildlife Notebook. There's also a chance at a trip to Walt Disney World.

Looks Like We're Finally Going To Be Able To Water Again!

The good news: The city council has accepted Austin Water's proposal to go off Stage 2!

Not quite as good: It won't be the current Stage 1. Instead automatic systems would still be allowed only once a week, while hose-end sprinklers would be allowed twice per week. But then a hose sprinkler could be used once a week in conjunction with an automatic system, which makes it almost Stage 1. Also car washing would be allowed at any time, as would hand watering (as it is now).

Current reservoir lake volumes total to "more than full", which has produced pressure to loosen watering restrictions. Austin Water developed these new guidelines in response.

Details of the proposed residential watering schedule:

Automatic watering between 7:00 p.m. the previous evening and 8:00 a.m. on Wednesdays for odd addresses, Thursday for even.

Hose-end watering between 7:00 p.m. the previous evening and 10:00 a.m. of the scheduled days:

Even addresses: Sunday and Thursday; Odd addresses Wednesday and Saturday

Hand watering and washing of cars and boats can be done anytime using a hose with a "positive shut-off valve" (so water doesn't run continuously) or a single bucket.

There is no burn ban in effect until further notice.

Calendar of Events

May	14-15, 21-22	West Austin Studio Tour; 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.; Free Maps at all library branches; see http://west.bigmedium.org/
	14	Free document shredding; Austin Community College Highland campus, 523 E. Highland Mall Blvd; 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
	14	CelebrASIA Food Festival; Asian American Resource Center; 8401 Cameron; 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. Learn Asian cooking techniques; Food and Beverages
	18 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	21	UT Commencement
	24	Jill's Property Tax Protest Workshop Walnut Creek Elementary Cafeteria; 6:30 - 8:00 p.m
	28-30	Texas Tax-Free Appliance Weekend; Midnight Saturday till midnight Monday Memorial Day; http://comptroller.texas.gov/taxinfo/taxpubs/tx96_1331/
	30	Memorial Day
June	1 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	2	Last day of school for AISD
	9-12	Republic of Texas (RoT) Rally; www.rotrally.com
	15 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	18-19	Juneteenth Celebration; Parade and other events on Saturday the 18th. See http://www.juneteenthcentraltexas.com/2015-EventCalendar-Update.html
	19	Father's Day
	20	First Day of Summer
	29 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
July	4	Fifth Annual Walnut Creek Neighborhood 4th of July Parade and Potluck Picnic Home of Christian and Luzdary Ninaud; 11809 Oakwood; After 10:30 a.m.

Austin City Council

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EMERGENCY: Police, Fire, EMS, Animal Control: **Call 911**
City of Austin: All services, codes & code violations, animal reports: **Call 311**

Get the smart phone 311 App:
<http://austintexas.gov/department/311/smart-phone-app>

Adam Soliz, APD District Rep
 (512) 974 8143
adam.soliz@austintexas.gov

Adan Ballesteros, County Constable, Pct 2 (512) 854-9697
Adan.Ballesteros@co.travis.tx.us

Austin Police Department Animal Cruelty Unit Tip Hot Line:
 (512) 978-0523

North Austin Coalition of Neighborhoods Newsletter is now a blog site, following a wide range of general city as well as neighborhood issues and events.
Read and Comment:
<http://www.lovenorthaustin.com/>

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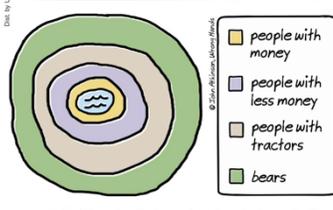
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simplified city map



- people with money
- people with less money
- people with tractors
- bears

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mediterranean cuisine
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11:00am - 2:00pm

Happy Hour
Daily 5-8pm



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PHONE: (512)833-6000
Facebook: Santorini Café, Music & Entertainment

Call us to make reservations for Private parties and Meetings



Tiny Wildflowers Following Rainy Period at Scurry & Tedford

May :: June 2016

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**A Thistle Volunteer From
Birdseed on Whitewing**

About WCNA and the newsletter

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association membership is open to any resident (owner or renter) or property owner within the boundaries, including perimeters, of the association.

Membership dues are \$15 per household for a calendar year. Send a check to: WCNA ; PO Box 82746; Austin, TX 78708-2746

Dues notices and payment envelopes are included in the Nov-Dec and Jan-Feb newsletters each year.

Payment also may be made using PayPal: <http://goo.gl/5iQlk>

WCNA News is sent to all members and every household within the boundaries represented by the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association: Braker Lane, North Lamar, I-35, and Yager Lane.

To contribute content to the newsletter, send contributions via email to wcna.contact@gmail.com or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620.

The opinions expressed in articles printed in this newsletter are the explicit opinions of the writer(s) and, unless explicitly stated, are not to be implied as the opinions of either the editor or the Board of Directors of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association, Inc.



**Pomegranate Blossoms and Buds
on Whitewing**