



July
August
2016

Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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Social Media/Listservs:

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Gary helps Joaquin enjoy riding the zipline

The potluck spread was - as usual - wonderful, as noted by between 50 and 60 attendees. Christian showed he knew all about grilling, and the rest of us showed we knew all about eating.



Vivian trying to decide: cupcake or watermelon?

Glorious Fifth Fourth Celebration!

How lucky we were! Southern breezes kept it balmy (for summer in Austin) for the whole thing, this year at the home of Christian and Luzdary Montoya-Ninaud! Of course if you joined the Fifth Annual Fourth of July Walnut Creek Neighborhood Parade you experienced additional radiation heating not felt under the trees of Christian and Luzdary's huge and shady front yard. But even the sunny spots were bearable at 11:00 a.m., and the misting system set up in the center of the yard helped a bunch afterward!

Kay and Joel Klumpp, who have hosted all the previous July 4th parade events, were enjoying cooler climes in Europe so they and a few other "regulars" were missing, but a good number of first-timers also made it this year. Ages ranged between four months and "octagenarian" (shall we say).

Kids quickly discovered the zipline set up between oak trees in the yard, and some adults needed the misters a lot after guiding them along the cable and making sure they didn't "encounter" the tree at the low end.

Starting the parade was just as organized this year as in the past, and the wide range of ages involved assured the usual dispersion of cohorts along the route. Next year we'll get organized for sure!



Host Christian at the Grill

All in all it the Fourth was a very enjoyable event. The only thing that would have made it more enjoyable is if you were there, and/or we had more marchers and/or observers, more flags, banners and noisemakers, or even music makers (a stirring march would have added to the patriotic feeling!). So let's pledge to assemble and "orchestrate" even better next year.

See you there!



Maya and Host Luzdary



Mason leads a middle cohort of the parade on Indianhead



Youngest present: Lucien with Dad Marc

2016 Mid Year Home Sales Review

By Jill Leberknight, Walnut Creek Real Estate Expert

The first half of 2016 is seeing continued growth in terms of sales price and price per square foot. The professional flip and remodel scene continue to play a big role in rising prices in our neighborhood. I am expecting the percentage of flips to remain at nearly half of the sales that we see in Walnut Creek Neighborhood for 2016. I am seeing a slight shift in the market in terms of days on market and repair negotiations. Homes are taking longer to sell and more repairs are surfacing during contract negotiations. It is my opinion that buyers see rising prices and now expect that the home core systems will be in top condition. It's not enough to just have a "good looking" property anymore. Having home systems in good order is becoming just as important as remodeled interiors.

SUBDIVISION	# SOLD	AVERAGE PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT	AVERAGE SALES PRICE	AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET	% Price Change
Eubank Acres	8	\$161.37	\$292,281 (\$340,000 Highest)	32	7.8% ↑
Walnut Forest	4	\$167.87	\$256,344 (\$298,000 highest)	35	42.4 %↑
Oak Ridge	4	\$143.63	\$269,500 (\$348,750 highest)	45	1.5%↑
Spanish Oak Ridge	0	--	--	--	--
Entire Walnut Creek Totals	16	\$159.18	\$278,648 (\$348,750 highest)	35 (147 days longest)	7%↑
WCN Flips	7	\$168.24.12	\$313,695	54 (147 days longest)	5%↓

But Are They Worth It?

Forbes recently published results of a Fitch model giving results of analysis to rank the most over- and under-evaluated of the fifty largest housing markets in the U.S. (<http://goo.gl/09HVwO>). And guess what: Austin and San Antonio tied for first place! Not sure what this says about TCADs assessments, since they're just trying to set values based on most recent sales numbers in various areas of the county. Since sales numbers are based on bidding on houses by people wanting or needing to buy a house, they clearly relate to availability of houses with characteristics most desired by those searching and the number of searchers compared to houses available; So by inference to job availability and people coming to the two cities to take advantage of those jobs.

A key statistic in the Fitch/Forbes assessment is the relative increases in "gross metro product (GMP)" and housing costs, and Austin and San Antonio have numbers higher than anyone else: e.g., GMP in Austin grew 18% between 2011 and 2014, while housing costs increased by 41%. The Fitch analysis thereby indicated both Austin and San Antonio are overvalued by 19%(!), higher even than San Francisco at 14%. (Maybe some of those folks will start going back to CA, eh?)

So you might try using this when you meet with TCAD about your property assessment. A 19% reduction would be nice, wouldn't it? Unfortunately what has to happen to keep our taxes from rising as fast as the assessed property values is reduction in the tax rate, and the rate change tends to lag the increased costs associated with all these people moving here and looking for houses. It's a vicious spiral in a rapidly growing city like Austin.

Hooray! Your Homestead Tax Exemption is Increasing for Austin

The city just voted to increase the percentage of the appraised value of your homestead from 6% to 8%. If your property has been declared as your homestead, your city taxes will thus be calculated using 92% of the appraised value shown on your tax notice instead of the 94% last year. Big deal? About \$23 for the average property.

You have established your property as your homestead, right? see http://www.traviscad.org/faq_exemptions.html
If not and it qualifies (read the form identified below) you can download the application here: <http://www.traviscad.org/forms.html>; Look under Homestead Exemptions. You can also request the form from Travis Central appraisal District by phone: Customer Service (512) 834-8651 or 834-9138.

Another Park Work Day, Another Job Well Done

Saturday, June 11th was National Trails Day - an American Hiking Society event - in Austin. The following paragraph is from their website (<http://nationaltrailsday.americanhiking.org/>) on the event:

"American Hiking Society's National Trails Day® (NTD) is a celebration of America's magnificent Trail System, occurring annually on the first Saturday in June. (In Austin this year, rain postponed the event for one week.) NTD features a series of outdoor activities, designed to promote and celebrate the importance of trails in the United States. Individuals, clubs and organizations from around the country host National Trails Day® events to share their love of trails with friends, family, and their communities."

In Austin, National Trails Day is sponsored by the Austin Parks Foundation, which supplies tools, volunteer sign-up software and other infrastructure to local neighborhood groups like WCNA and other trail-minded civic organizations such as the Sierra Club. WCNA has participated with our trail, Walnut Bluffs, for the last couple of years, with Tasha Bowser taking the lead to organize this years' June event.



Dorsey Twidwell and Gary Brewer "plan" while younger volunteers go

Our event was entitled, "Buff the Bluffs". Trail mulch was added where spring rains had washed out the trail, trees were mulched, invasive plants were removed, and the trail was generally "spruced up." Mulch was provided by the Austin Parks Foundation and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

Volunteers this year came both from our neighborhood and across Austin. The volunteers from outside our neighborhood chose our trail project from a list of trail opportunities on the Austin Parks Foundation website.

Volunteers included Tasha Bowser, Gary Brewer, Margaret Brewer, Bradley Linscomb, Olivia Linscomb, Jim Letchworth, Donna



President Robert Meadows breaks a sweat

Mantide, Scott Mantide, Joan Hatcher, Robert Meadows, Dorsey Twidwell, Elizabeth Switek, Amanda Costello, Ann Costello, Sharon Porter, Tina Vick and children, Paul Birdsall, Brian Scott, David Martin, Derek Martin, Jim Wallen, Heather Wallen, Ashley Wallen, Trey Dinges, Jennifer Ramos. Thanks and kudos to you all!



Eight Volunteers from other neighborhoods joined our biggest Walnut Creek crew to date: Nineteen!

You May Have a Natural Mosquito Repellant in Your Yard!

Research at the University of Mississippi has revealed that a plant that grows well in our area does indeed contain a substance which repels many biting insects, including mosquitoes. The plant is Beautyberry, which grows wild in the South from here to Florida, and has been utilized for years by rural folks as well as some animals. The berries can be made into jelly and the roots used to make a tea, but it is the leaves which provide the repellant properties. You can crush them and rub them on your skin to provide the protection. Old timers would keep branches with crushed leaves around, for example attached to the bridles of horses to ward off horseflies and other insects which irritated the humans as well as the horses.



Typical Beautyberry

One of the best things about Beautyberry leaves is their apparent safety, as no significant side effects have been noted. On the other hand, the ingredients which have been found to provide the

protection - callicarpenal, intermedeol and spathulenol - have not been registered with the EPA nor undergone the human testing to determine toxicity and evaporation rates, and development to make a cost-effective commercial product has not been undertaken.

But we can use it when we find or grow it! It's been shown to be effective against Malaria- and Yellow Fever-bearing mosquitoes, which means it's likely that it will work against the Zika-bearing species, Aedes aegypti, shown here.



The Aedes aegypti Mosquito as it Would Appear on an Anglo

We Score Big in Watershed Protection (WP)!

You may know the wet-weather creek/drainage ditch that runs between Oakwood and Whitewing by the name most property owners along it do: Skunk Creek. It used to run with spring water much of the year, but since the drought of the '50s it runs only after significant precipitation. Sometimes, like earlier this year, it runs furiously. Increases in impervious cover over the years (and continuing even today) have magnified the flow, and it can carry very large rocks and tree parts along with the trash which never seems to end. [Side note: Since the creek begins just on the other side of Braker Lane, this continual torrent of trash is mysterious, though the frequent inclusion of automobile parts strongly point to at least one source. Property owners on the creek are being advised to report accumulation of trash via 311 to provide Watershed Protection some authority to investigate.]

Skunk Creek is a (once County and now) City easement on the Whitewing property owners side, and "is supposed to be" maintained by the appropriate agency. But it has had no "official" maintenance since the neighborhood was established, despite trees falling into it, serious erosion, and the aforementioned trash. The situation got much worse recently when fallen trees and exposed tree roots produced rapid and massive erosion on one property to the extent that the property owners lost their back fence into an eight-foot-deep chasm, and a culvert built on another property early in our development history began to fail. These developments resulted in an engineering study early this year followed by a decision by WP to fix the worst of these problems. Preliminary vegetation-clearing and surveying operations were made, and in June work started at two points along and in the Creek.

A drainage easement that carries water from Whitewing to Skunk Creek in the 11400 block of Whitewing was utilized to get some serious machinery down to and in the creek. Several trees - both fallen and at risk of falling (especially if contacted by one of these machines) - were removed and excavation to control the creekbed slope began. The bed also is being straightened and lined with large rocks and boulders to prevent erosion. And perhaps the best part is that part of the bank will be restored to allow the homeowners to recover their missing back yard. The resulting channel should provide smoother flow to better carry most natural detritus down to Walnut Creek, though automobile parts may find ways to snag and hang around awhile. This also should prevent water backing up into back yards - even threatening flooding of some houses - as it has under heavy precipitation in the past.



Boulders at the bottom of the slope where the Oakwood property on the left has been seriously eroded.



Culverts being buried on the Oakwood/Caddo site.

The other work noted on social media is off Oakwood near where Caddo intersects. The creek that runs between Caddo and Covington makes a left turn not far from where it crosses Oakwood, running through a large culvert into Skunk Creek at a shallow angle. It appears that this was a man-made intervention to reduce/prevent erosion where this branch would have intersected Skunk Creek. In any case, this culvert was in the process of failing and is being replaced by a concrete culvert - three feet in diameter - during this same period.

As you could guess by seeing the equipment, manpower and time involved this is a large project. In fact, since the WP field crew for all of north Austin comprises only ten people we are using most of the Watershed manpower on a periodic basis (they are switching between these and other projects as priorities require). Of course, if you average the effort over the 60 or so years of our existence it really isn't that big. Nevertheless, it's a big score for a neighborhood which was told we would get no drainage help after being annexed, because we wouldn't be worth the money. But then if you look at our tax bills these days...

Now it may be coincidental that our board member Dorsey Twidwell was on the Flood Mitigation Task Force established by the city to study and make recommendations for addressing the city's flooding issues, but we're glad he's been there anyway.

BikeAustin Plans Fun and Educational Event in North Austin

Ciclovia is the name given to an event planned primarily for disadvantaged kids and young adults in Austin. They will be given training in riding and maintaining bicycles, and the hope is that all who attend will be given a free bike and helmet. While other programs have given bikes away in the past, Cyclovia is emphasizing training in operational safety and mechanical maintenance to support the use of bicycles for basic transportation. The first "party" is scheduled for August 27th at the North Austin Event Center, between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. BikeAustin is also looking for sponsors to set up booths at the event as well as general donations in the form of case or operational/repairable bicycles. To learn more contact Mercedes Feris at mercedes@bikeaustin.org.

Play a Fun and Potentially Very Serious Game

OK, we all know about the (probably soon-to-be-"real") self-driving cars under development (and already on our streets in Austin, thanks to Google). There are many reasons to be encouraged by the possibility of such: probably better "drivers" than we are; allow productive (or not) use of commute time; solve our "sense of direction" issues; potentially reduce the number of vehicles and amount of pollution; etc.

On the other hand, the possibility introduces a whole set of dilemmas under emergency conditions. Besides the problem of such vehicles having to contend with the worst and most unpredictable drivers on our streets, they must "think" about what maneuvers to make under such situations to develop rules for action. Thus a sense of ethics - or as the site indicates "morality" - must be built into the control systems. Example: If the brakes fail (which the car should recognize instantly) how does it "get out" of a situation with traffic and/or barriers ahead and to the side and cars and pedestrians ahead and/or to the side, with or without passengers in the car? This site refers to a car's reaction under such life-threatening scenarios as "Moral Machine", and aims to get carefully considered human responses to potential emergency situations (actual human response would have to be instantaneous and probably near random). Results will be used in development of "training algorithms" with the intention of generating decision-making processes for controlling self-driving cars if/when they're ever actually deployed.

The site is <http://moralmachine.mit.edu/>. It has a video which does a pretty good job of describing how to "play the game" and compare your results with those from previous players. You can use as many of their scenarios as you like or generate ones of your own. Try it: It will make you think while being entertained!

Neighbor Julie Prien handles Poofy Organics

Julie and her husband Albert - along with their two cats - have lived in the neighborhood since becoming first-time homeowners on Whitewing in 2013. They had been renting in central Austin and saving to make the leap for years, and jumped just as the boom started (Julie notes that in another few months they probably wouldn't have been able to afford it!). Like most of us, they appreciate the big (especially oak) trees, friendly neighbors and active neighborhood association.

Julie recently joined Poofy Organics, a small, 10-year-old, family-owned company which features organic, safe and cruelty-free skin-care and beauty products. See philosophy and products at <https://austin.poofyorganics.com/>, <https://www.facebook.com/julie.poofyorganics>). Julie can fix you up through the URLs above or via email at poofy.austin@gmail.com. She also can organize real and online product parties for you, friends and acquaintances.



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New Water Conservation Rules Now In Place

- Water only on your [assigned day\(s\)](#) and times:
 - **Residential**
 - **Hose-end Sprinklers**
 - two days per week - midnight to 10 a.m. and/or 7 p.m. to midnight
 - **Automatic Irrigation***
 - one day per week - midnight to 10 a.m. and/or 7 p.m. to midnight
 - **Commercial / Multi-family / Public Schools**
 - **Hose-end Sprinklers or Automatic Irrigation***
 - one day per week - midnight to 10 a.m. and/or 7 p.m. to midnight
- Washing vehicles at home is permitted with an auto shut-off hose or bucket
- Charity car washes are only allowed at a commercial carwash
- Fountains must recirculate water
- Restaurants may not serve water unless requested by a customer
- Commercial properties (including restaurants and bars) may only operate patio misters between 4 p.m. and midnight
- Wasting water is prohibited



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HOSE-END SPRINKLERS
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Odd Address: **Wed, Sat**

HOURS
Midnight - 10 AM
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Home Car Wash Allowed with Bucket or Auto Shut-Off Hose

Tree Bubblers, Hand-Held Hose, Drip Irrigation: Any Day/TIME

There is no burn ban in effect until further notice.

From the Library: SRP'16: Summer Reading Program

It's that time again! The **Austin Public Library** is your free ticket to a summer full of reading and loads of fun activities this June through August. Suggested reading lists are given by age. All Library programs are free and open to the public:

Singing Librarians • Puppet Shows • Live Birds • Marine Life • Storytelling • Movies • Dance • Rhythm & Percussion • Arts & Crafts

The [Music Division of the City of Austin](#) will offer a spectacular series for families featuring a variety of Austin musicians.

For more information APL's Summer Reading Program call 512-974-7400, [Ask a Librarian](#) or use #AustinSRP.

Calendar of Interesting Events

July	8-13	58th Zilker Summer Musical: Shrek the Musical; Starts 8:15 p.m. at Zilker Hillside
	14-24	Shakespeare at Winedale; https://www.facebook.com/Shakespeare.at.Winedale
	13 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	25-29	City Bulk Item Collection; Starts on 25th and ends when everything is gone
	27 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	28-7 Aug	Shakespeare at Winedale; https://www.facebook.com/Shakespeare.at.Winedale
August	5-7	State Sales Tax Holiday
	6	AISD Back to School Bash; 9:00 - noon; Palmer Events Center
	8-11	AISD Elementary School Registration
	10 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	13	Austin Ice Cream Festival; Fiesta Gardens; 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
	20	Austin Bat Festival; Congress Ave (Ann Richards) Bridge; Starts about dusk
	22	AISD First day of class
	24 Wed	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	27	BikeAustin's Ciclovía: North Austin Event Center; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Sept	5	Labor Day

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EMERGENCY: Police, Fire, EMS, Animal Control: Call 911

City of Austin: All services, codes & code violations, animal reports: Call 311

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Austin311 on Google Play and iTunes

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(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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Tiny flower blooms after rain at Scurry and Tedford

July :: August 2016

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Vitex behind Pride of Barbados on Covington

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.



Unusual Fungus During Rainy Weeks on Whitewing