



# Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

A pdf version in color is available at [www.WCNAnews.com](http://www.WCNAnews.com)

Jan  
Feb  
2022

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## (Belated) Happy New Year!

Once again: It's gotta be better than the last one, right?  
It's good to be hopeful. Especially in the face of another Covid Wave.  
Masks on, Fingers crossed...  
Here's wishing you – and all of us – a safer and more peaceful year!

## There is Good News: The WCNA General Meeting Will Be Held on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

And thanks to Omicron, it will again be held on Zoom  
Find Out What's Happening in Our Neighborhood!

Speakers will be on hand to talk about safety issues, our real estate/housing situation, local sustainable projects, status of work on our trail, Google fiber (if not completed), and other topics.

And, of course, WCNA members can vote on new and continuing WCNA board members.

Please don't be intimidated by technology: Zoom is very easy to use when you have it on your computer, tablet or smartphone. If you don't have the app yet, go to [https://zoom.us/download#chrome\\_ext](https://zoom.us/download#chrome_ext) and download the version for your situation (computer web browser, smartphone, etc), and follow instructions to install it.

The "meeting ID" and password for the General Meeting will be posted on Nextdoor and the neighborhood Facebook group (Walnut Creek Neighborhood – Austin, Texas at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/wcnaupdates>) before the meeting. When you initiate Zoom you will see a button to join a meeting: click on that and enter the meeting ID in the box, then enter the password in the box which pops up next and click on "join".

**You Will Learn New Things About Your Neighborhood! Keep Your Eye on the Social Media!**

## The (Our) Trail is Changing Fast!

**It's for real now!** You can see it without going onto it, at the Lamar entrances just south of the bridge over Walnut Creek (Fig 1). Heavy earth-moving equipment has been working there for several weeks, and there are now caliche construction "roads" that eventually will be the Lamar entrances to the North Walnut Creek, or Urban, Trail now at the beginning of construction after nearly 20 years. These roads usually are being used for work on weekdays until about 5:00 p.m., but frequently will occupy many hours outside the normal ones. So it



**Fig 1: Looking from the new Urban Trail east entrance off Lamar across to the new entrance on the west side (note heavy equipment).**

may not be safe to park on them at any given time; watch for workmen's vehicles.

Construction of the 12-foot-wide concrete trail has started in earnest. Work will commence from these Lamar entrances along our "main" trail, running along and near the creek (Fig 2) and then up and across the highline ROW to our trailhead on Oakbrook. Except at our entrance this part of our trail is now "fenced" using the orange plastic fencing material typical of construction sites. Fig 2 shows this fencing near the point where the trail curves up as just described. **By Public Works instruction, we are not to use the fenced part of trail as long as construction continues, in order to avoid disruption of work and to assure safety.**



**Fig 2: A portion of the trail under construction following our "main trail" along the creek, which is on the left. The orange fencing marks the construction zone, which we should consider "off limits".**





Gary drives his famous Kubota tractor into the trailhead. He's done this an uncountable number of times to build and maintain our park. Thus his nickname: "The Kubota Kid"!

This is why Gary Brewer long ago planned and more recently expended a great deal of time and effort defining and constructing an "inner trail" that loops outside the main trail, to the west and north. This provides us an alternative to the main trail - of similar length and quality - which will allow us to continue using the park without impinging on the construction area. With the help of volunteers at Park Work Days the trail now is ready for use.

When entering from Oakbrook you will immediately note the orange fencing, which "directs" you to the left side of the "old" entrance trail, and from which you will see signs directing you to the two ends of the Inner Trail: the Upper and Lower entrances/exits. In case signage is missing just use the trees marked with white paint – see Fig 3 – to find the Lower Inner Trail, and look left to see the path that starts/ends the Upper Inner Trail. Taking either of these will eventually curve your progress up or down to the other, or you can take any of several trails that also connect these two and provide a shorter trip.

Progress is expected to be rapid, and work on our Oakbrook connection to the Urban Trail could begin by early in March. When this connection happens – the concrete trail will follow our current entrance path – orange fencing will be installed which will prevent us from taking our usual path to reach the inner trail entrances shown in Fig 3.

When this happens, Gary will organize and install a culvert in the drainage ditch you see now on the left side of the entrance. It will be covered and packed to provide safe entry into the area shown.

Once work starts on that connection it is expected to finish in a matter of a few weeks, weather permitting. This connector trail to provide ADA-compliant access to the actual Urban Trail (North Walnut Creek Trail) will be 8 feet wide, as contrasted with the 12-foot primary trail, with no signage at the connecting point off the circular path marking the end of that trail (the idea is not to promote heavy public usage of that section, hoping to minimize impact of traffic into the neighborhood). The main trail eventually will continue on under the IH35 bridge and connect with the existing Southern Walnut Creek Trail near Johnny Morris Road.

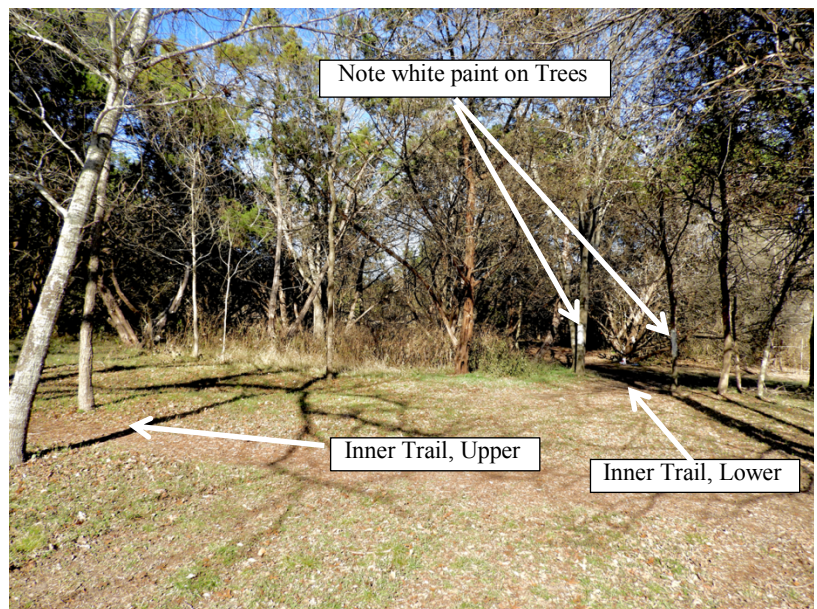


Fig 3: Just inside Oakbrook entrance of Walnut Bluffs Trailhead

### **Google Fiber is "In the House"! Almost.** by Robert Meadows

Google Fiber (GF) has received permits from the City of Austin to carry out microtrenching on every street in our neighborhood. The purpose of this microtrenching is to bring Google internet services to our neighborhood. **(A)** For areas with curbs, a microtrench 1- to 2-inches wide and 10- to 18-inches deep will be dug at the seam between the curb concrete and the roadway, optical fiber will be laid, and the trench will be filled with a fast-drying flowable overlay and then with a crack sealant, ultimately leaving a black line. As of this time of Sunday, 9 January 2022, microtrenching of this type can be seen on the north side of Braker, between Tedford and the entrance to the commercial center (the "old Albertson's"). **(B)** For areas without curbs, the original intent by GF was to place a microtrench 6 inches to the property owner's side from where a curb "should be". One should remember that, in our neighborhood, the City-owned right-of-way (ROW) actually extends more-or-less as far as the first seam in a driveway (first seam from the street side; the line formed by telephone poles also delineates the ROW, again more-or-less), so a microtrench 6 inches to the property owner's side of a hypothetical curb is still in the ROW. GF has stated that, in areas without curbs, GF prefers to trench in the street, but that the City of Austin requires trenching 6 inches to the property owner's side of a hypothetical curb. GF has stated that this is perhaps due to concerns by the City of Austin that trenching in the street will accelerate deterioration of the street. It is also thought that root systems are protected by the fact that, even in the absence of surface pavement, the roadbed itself does still extend underground beyond the pavement (basically, either the roots have already been cleared in the past, or the alkaline character of the roadbed has discouraged roots from entering the roadbed).

Around 1 November 2021, GF contractors carried out microtrenching on Tedford in order to place a main trunk line. This microtrenching went poorly. A gas line was broken and trenching was carried out across or proximal to the root crown of a protected oak at Scurry and Tedford. As a consequence of communications from WCNA board members and other concerned residents to Council Member Pool (specifically to chief-of-staff Louisa Brinsmade), City of Austin arborists, and the City of Austin ROW Division, GF agreed to suspend further microtrenching in the neighborhood until a plan could be evolved in consultation with the City of Austin that would address the concerns of the neighborhood, particularly with regard to trees in the trench line in areas without curbs. The neighborhood has suggested that an arborist survey for trees that could be impacted and that trenching somehow be adapted to account for such trees. It is generally thought that microtrenching in areas with curbs will be unproblematic.

On 13 December 2021, GF contacted the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association and stated that a plan had been evolved with the City of Austin to proceed with microtrenching in the neighborhood. A meeting between GF and the neighborhood was requested, and a ZOOM meeting was held on Friday, 17 December 2021, from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. This meeting was hosted by the Association and was well-attended, with 24 participants. This was noted by John-Michael V. Cortez (Government and Community Affairs, Google Fiber) and by Lyssette Galvan (see above). This good attendance gives us credibility for the future. The results:

- 1) In the curbed areas of the neighborhood, trenching will proceed as noted above in **(A)**.
- 2) The following procedure will be used in curbless areas. In the absence of trees, the trenching will proceed as described in **(B)** above, but the trench will be filled with flowable fill to within 1- to 2-inches of the surface, and then sod will be laid to restore the top of the trench to the surroundings. In the presence of trees on or near the trench line, trenching may detour to one foot into the pavement, and this trench will be milled and paved to 1-foot on either side. The decision to detour into the street will be made based on how the trench would otherwise traverse the critical root zone of the particular tree. This will be assessed in the field by the contractors and by City of Austin inspectors.
- 3) Trenching on Scurry between North Lamar and Tedford will proceed in a zag-zag manner from one side of the street to the other to avoid tree roots and shrubs.
- 4) In order to avoid the root damage and/or spread of pathogens by the trenching machine, John-Michael is requesting that Google Fiber use an air spade near trees (this tool uses a high-speed air jet to displace soil).
- 5) Trenching will be carried out on both sides of the street, but not at the same time. Trenching on only one side of the street at a time means that the street can stay open during the trenching operation.
- 8) At every other property line, Google Fiber will leave a drop, aka a pigtail, to serve the residents as needed.
- 7) Residents will be notified generally at least 48 hours ahead of time by no parking signs and door hangers.
- 8) Google Fiber will move vehicles left in their path as a last resort, and they will be moved back on completion.

The various permits under which Google Fiber operates are being re-written to encompass the adaptations to curbless streets proposed by John-Michael in the 17 December 2021 meeting. The Association will be given a heads up before Google Fiber proceeds with trenching in the neighborhood.

Contact information:

1-877-454-6959 (Google Fiber, to address real-time construction issues)

[jmvc@google.com](mailto:jmvc@google.com) (John-Michael V. Cortez, the Google Fiber contact for this project, who, incidentally, has been very gracious with his time and very responsive)

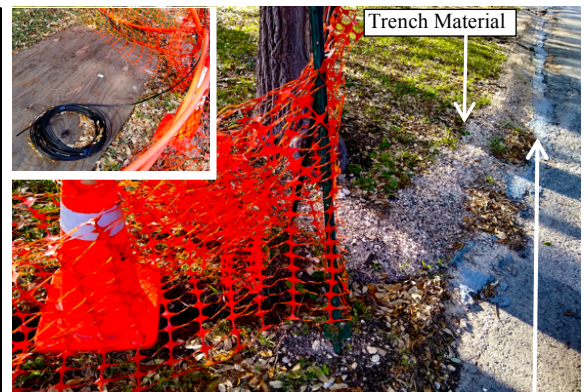
[Lyssette.galvan@austintexas.gov](mailto:Lyssette.galvan@austintexas.gov) (Lyssette Galvan is a Constituent Services aide for Council Member Leslie Pool, and the neighborhood is quite fortunate that the Council Member's office has been participating. This is a major (and amazing) improvement brought about by the 10-1 council districts.)

The information herein was obtained from the Austin Build + Connect database, communications with John-Michael V. Cortez (Government and Community Affairs Google Fiber), direct observations in the field, and conversations with directly-involved parties.

Google has been in Austin since 2015, planning to provide gigabit-per-second fiber to all parts of the city. They started intentionally in neighborhoods with lower-income residents in south Austin, and are just now making it into our neighborhood (they install by neighborhood, not general area). Available speeds have increased (to 2 Gbps in our area) and prices are stable at \$70/month for 1 Gbps and \$100 for 2 Gbps, compared - for example - to about \$60 for ATT for 1 Gbps.

They no longer support Google Fiber TV, which provided 100-channel cable TV service, replacing it with streaming options. As for reliability and support service, apparently it can be spotty, just like everybody else's - seems like everybody complains about their setup with all the service providers (except those lucky ones who never have a problem).

One of the "discoveries" which has slowed expansion has been the costs encountered in big cities: about \$1B per city.



Google Fiber laid at Tedford and Scurry: The covered trench can be seen along the right side - bluish tint at edge of the asphalt.

The inset shows the coil of optic fiber being buried.



## **2021 Walnut Creek Real Estate Year in Review**

*By Walnut Creek Real Estate expert, Jill Leberknight*

**There are years** that canter into history. Some even gallop. Last year's real estate scene felt like a wild ride into the wilderness on a strange horse.

Then, in the waning days of 2021, we saw some familiar market trends in our little shire.

Needless to say, we're all a little exhausted. So pull up a seat at Jill's New Year's campfire and let me lay out the highlights, trends, and my predictions for the real estate market specifically in our Walnut Creek Neighborhood community.

### **Highlights**

**MULTIPLE OFFERS:** Austin tops the nation for toughest multiple offer market competition. The year began with a perfect storm of critically low home inventory, (both resale and new builds) combined with an increase in new Central Texas residents that lead to a once-in-a-lifetime historic battle for home ownership. I.e. we may never see this level of housing competition again in our lifetimes.

**DELAYED NEW BUILDS:** Supply chain obstacles and staff shortages through the pandemic continued to slow down an already lagging new residential construction market. While still recovering from the 2008 mortgage crisis, new home construction hit a critical state when buyers who lost out on their offers left the resale scene hoping for better fortunes in new construction. This strategy quickly led to another historic level of bidding wars for new build lots across the metro and suburbs. Buyers faced upwards of 1,500 bids on 1-6 lots. Builders all but auctioned off lots to the highest bidders with few (or none) options for buyers to select design options. Remember the Cabbage Patch Doll craze of the 80's? Buyers took what they were given.

**PANDEMIC:** Suddenly, when it felt like we were charging full speed towards "million-dollar home values," Memorial Day arrived. Increased access to vaccines, lifted mask mandates, and rising confidence meant many buyers simply left the market. While relaxing over the Memorial Day Weekend they had time to pause and rethink their home purchasing plans. They returned with new limits and demands on what they were (and were not) willing to do to win a home bid. Inventory still remained low but buyers didn't make offers or even tour a home if it was priced too high. They were willing to walk away if homes needed too many repairs or if sellers were unreasonable. Buyers shifted to a long game strategy which often included moving further out to more affordable communities in Jarrell and Kyle.

**APPRAISALS:** Right as this summer cool-down was arriving a new player entered the scene in 2021 that slowed down the market even more. Appraisals. Many professional appraisers in the Austin area had been working non-stop though the Pandemic like our health care workers. As the summer waned, some appraisers were not picking up as many jobs and some were even price gouging for quick orders. Lenders struggled to meet standard 30-day closing timeframes.

**BY YEAR'S END** we started to see a noticeable increase in contract terminations due to financing, repair issues, job changes, permitting issues and more.

**A NEW CHARACTER:** Have you met an iBuyer? If you haven't yet, you probably will. The "Big Three" institutional iBuyers (Zillow, Opendoor, and Offerpad) increased their presence in late Spring and by summer were aggressively buying inventory. Many homes in the Austin Metro area were bought for considerably more than market values. This over-speculation caused one of the major iBuyers, Zillow, to hurriedly shut down its home buying program in early November. Now buyers purchasing iBuyer properties are facing large appraisal shortages which in turn are affecting neighborhood resale values. These institutional buyers had a short window of capital early in the year dedicated towards purchasing market share. I am seeing a cooling off of iBuyer offer ranges with my clients (in their final net after repairs and services fees) that now fall below fair market opportunity.

### **Trends**

**LAND!** Land and mixed-use space has become a target for buyers right now. So, think beyond the four walls of your home and consider improvements, maintenance, and upkeep of your yard. Think about the full space of your lot and its future use. Space is coveted in Austin city limits right now. How could a potential home buyer use yours? ADUs (accessory dwelling units) and studio space will be a next chapter of land use. Buyers want usable, ready-to-go outdoor entertainment areas. They want the garden, fire pit, workshop, deck, and patio with stringed lights ready to party! **JILL'S INSIDE TIP:** Invest in your yard before you invest in remodeling your bathroom.

**CONDITION OF HOME:** With increased price comes an increased fear of financial risk. Buyers taking on a \$600,000 price tag are simply not willing to repair expensive systems like under-slab plumbing, HVAC, or new roof replacements. Repairs costing more than \$10,000 is a deal breaker for them right now. I am seeing this with both

new and experienced home owners. When we were under the half-million mark buyers had more confidence, but it wanes as we approach \$600k. This has been, and continues to be, one of the biggest challenges right now in WCN.

**CHARACTER OF HOME:** Buyers will no longer pay top dollar for just anything. They want character and a story to walk into. Many incoming home buyers are from out-of-state and are discovering our city culture, lifestyle, architecture and Texas ranch style homes. More and more of our buyers are tech or executive workers who have little interest or time in creating a home space but they have the resources to buy one that's ready to go. **JILL'S INSIDE TIP:** Time and time again I see homes achieve exceptionally high interest—and values—when care is taken to craft a **CLEAR HOME STORY**. Our Walnut Creek Neighborhood homes are quality built homes by master craftsmen of the era. I have also witnessed enormous character and creativity from homeowners over the 17 years I've been working with our neighborhood. There are many creative "design-on-a-dime solutions" that work in our unique homes. **2022 PREVIEW ALERT:** This year, I'll be creating a special series highlighting many of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Friendly design tips and tricks I've learned!

### Home Goals 2022

- Step outside and lend a bit of energy to your outside living room.
- Stay on top of systems and maintenance.
- Watch for the 2022 Home Repair Fair that Walnut Creek Neighbor (and my Real Estate partner) Beth Coffey will host at her office at Trinity Title. We have everyone from landscapers to painters, contractors, plumbers and more.

### Agent Jill's 2022 Real Estate Predictions

We are going to have a very busy first two quarters of 2022. I don't think we are going to see the same level of multiple offers this year. We increased values a little more than \$100,000 in WCN in 2021 but I'm expecting closer to a 13%-15% increase in 2022. Of course, unique homes that include all of the trends that I outlined above, with great use of land, great condition and character, will exceed these increases just as they did this year. Several rare WCN homes achieved 60% above average! The reality for 2022 is that buyers and buyer agents have refined their strategy and investment skills and have adjusted their plans to engage over the long haul. I am expecting more non-traditional buyers to enter the market. We will still see institutional buyers playing in the market but I think extended relation and non-related persons will explore collaborative homeownership opportunities. I predict iBuyers are going to continue to disrupt the way buyers navigate home purchases increasing the need for home consultants and planners to help advocate and educate. Home sellers are going to have to carefully strategize how to identify their priority goals and best position their property. Walnut Creek Neighborhood is in a unique location with ideal amenities for a variety of prime buyers. Our average home values are passing the half million mark!

We are homeowners in a changing environment sitting on investments in a top market in the country. My first advice to clients navigating complex real estate decisions in our market is paint a vibrant picture of what you need in your mind, then work backwards to create it. Ask for help if you need it. You have more options this year than we've ever had!

### 2021 SOLD STATISTICS

SUBDIVISION	# SOLD	AVERAGE PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT	AVERAGE SALES PRICE	AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET	% Price Change
Eubank Acres	7	\$297.87	\$471,071 (\$585,000 highest)	24	9.5% ↑
Walnut Forest	7	\$219.50	\$486,576 (\$825,000 highest)	43	30%↑
Oak Ridge	13	\$291.55	\$545,146(\$839,000 highest)	24	29%↑
Spanish Oak Ridge	0	0	0	0	0
Entire Walnut Creek Totals	27	\$274.51	\$510,757 (\$839,000 highest)	24 (142 longest)	<b>22%↑</b>
<b>20/21 Pandemic Era Increase</b>					<b>44.8% ↑</b>

\*Note these are Multiple Listing Online stats only. There were several off-market private sales in our community in 2021 that are not included. The sales in that category likely would not have affected this data significantly.

**For you old-timers** who might not have gotten the word:

The original Catfish Parlour on 183 has closed after 48 years. The old icons continue to disappear!

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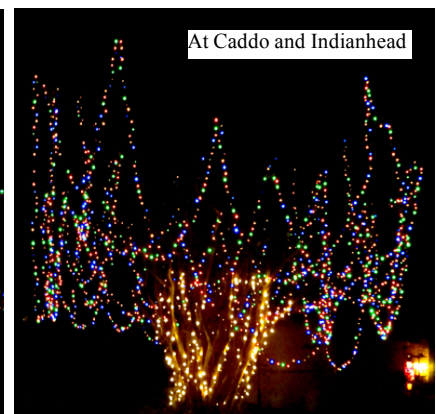
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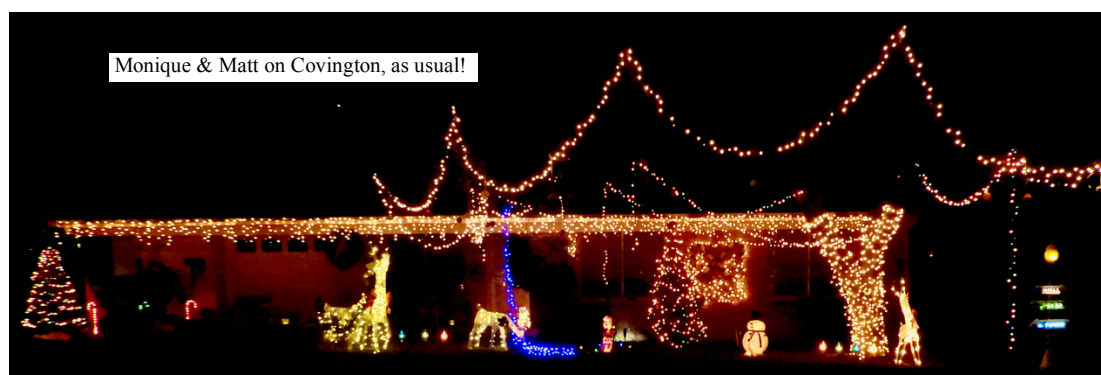


Mendy on Covington



At Caddo and Indianhead

If you haven't tried the "new" TCAD site, you're in for a pleasant surprise. It takes a little to explore the options and then you'll search and research much faster.



Monique &amp; Matt on Covington, as usual!

All pets are  
therapy pets.  
Most are just  
working undercover

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Fireworks have gotten out of  
hand in our neighborhoods. We  
need some kind of  
"intervention" process with our  
perpetrator (it is illegal!)  
neighbors. It will be up to us!

# WCNA Annual General Meeting: Zoom, 22 Feb 6:00 p.m.

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## Walnut Creek Neighborhood

**Association membership** is open to any resident (owner or renter) or property owner within the boundaries, including perimeters, of the association described below.

**Membership dues** are \$25 per household for a calendar year. Send a check to: WCNA ; PO Box 82746; Austin, TX 78708-2746

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

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

**WCNA News** is sent to every household within the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association boundaries: Braker Lane to Yager Lane and North Lamar to IH-35.

**To contribute content** to the newsletter, send contributions via email to [wcna.contact@gmail.com](mailto:wcna.contact@gmail.com) or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620.

## Calendar of Events

Jan	17	Martin Luther King Jr. Day - Banks & post office closed
	19	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Feb	1	Chinese / Lunar New Year
	2	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	14	Valentine's Day
	14	Early Voting Begins
	16	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	21	Presidents' Day - Banks & Post Office closed
	22	WCNA Annual Meeting – Zoom, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
	25	Early voting ends
Mar	1	Election Day
	1	Mardi Gras
	2	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	7	Large Brush Collection - starts Monday until all is picked up
	13	Daylight Savings time begins - Spring forward
	14-18	AISD Spring Break
	14-20	SXSW Music Festival
	16	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.