



Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

A pdf version in color is available at www.WCNAnews.com

Mar
Apr
2021

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Dues information is shown in this newsletter on the back page beside your address label. Information is shown for paying by check or PayPal.

Social Media/Listservs:

NextDoor: <https://is.gd/3K9VnZ>

Facebook: <http://goo.gl/4G41rS>

Website: www.WCNAnews.com

Connect with your neighbors. Stay up to date.

Join us for the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association Annual Meeting

Tuesday, March 30 – 6-8 pm on Zoom!

By Sara Breuer

ZOOM!



MEETINGS & CHAT

Howdy, neighbors! Our annual meeting of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association is set for Tuesday, March 30 from 6-8 pm on Zoom! We hope you will join us! **Don't worry if you haven't done Zoom before.** It's a very simple process. You can join our Zoom meeting using a browser on your computer or phone by going to www.zoom.us and click on "Join a Meeting".

You will need the meeting ID and password, both of which are numbers, which will be published on the neighborhood Nextdoor and Facebook sites well in advance if the meeting.

You can also go to the WCNA website, www.wcnanews.com and click on the "6:00 p.m. WCNA Annual Meeting" label to the right of the picture.

We will be able to have as many people log-in as wish to do so, and encourage everyone to turn their cameras on if practical and use their real name on their Zoom ID. How to do these things will be explained at the start of the meeting, or you can view "help videos" on the Zoom site

The meeting is open to all, whether or not you're a member, but only members are allowed to vote. Without new motions, voting will be only on election of new board of director members Siobhan Blackburn and James Miller.

Join today using PayPal: just \$15 a year! <https://bit.ly/3v1YKQS>

We'll have a link for you in the meeting so you can vote, and votes will be verified against the member list, tabulated, and communicated after the meeting.

This year we have FIVE exciting door prizes that will be given away to lucky attendees. You must be present (on Zoom, that is) to win! Some will be for members only – so join today and be part of it!

- Locking mailbox
- Anker brand power brick for recharging your devices
- Weather station that shows indoor and outdoor temps, humidity, and barometric pressure
- Red Cross emergency radio that runs on batteries and can also be hand-cranked
- Countertop compost kit – bucket, filters, and a starter kit of compostable bags

Agenda items:

- **Walnut Bluffs Trailhead update** – learn more about the paved trail that will be built along our neighborhood trail. Many years in the planning, construction is slated to begin soon.
<https://data.austintexas.gov/stories/s/Walnut-Creek-Trail-System/v3dz-djp9>
<https://bit.ly/30jwWt4>
- **Traffic planning** – the City's Project Connect transit plan will have a huge impact along North Lamar. Learn what's coming our way.
<https://www.capmetro.org/project-connect>
<https://bit.ly/38ekeQK>
- **Real estate update** – what has been happening with buying and selling, trends, and potential impact for our property taxes.
- **Safety and community building** – Neighborhood Watch Update and what you can do to help us make our neighborhood safer and help people feel connected.
- **Exciting new events** and ways for you to get and stay connected with neighbors in ways that fit your interests. Make friends, make a difference, and keep up with easy ways to stay informed with issues that affect our neighborhood, at whatever level you want to engage.



Example of the Trail Coming to Our Park

See you Tuesday, March 30 at 6 pm on Zoom.

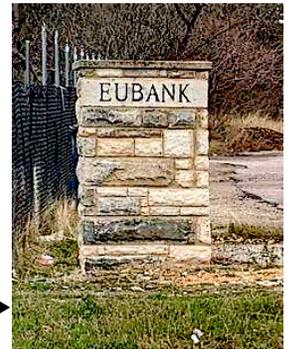
Note: Recycle & Reuse Drop-Off Center, 2514 BusinessCenter Drive is open for appointments:

<http://austintexas.gov/department/recycle-reuse-drop-center>

Eubank entrance pillar rebuilt! *by Robert Meadows*

Likely on last summer's night of July 31/August 1, the northern pillar (the one bearing the word "Eubank") of the two pillars at our Caddo entrance on North Lamar was demolished by a vehicle. The column was rebuilt on Friday, February 5th, by contractor Clayton Diehr (cell 512-801-9553, office 512-282-8008) and George the mason. The cost was \$1400, about half of which has been raised so far by contributions from Walnut Creek residents.

Many participated in the project. Eric Shaughnessy, Jim Calvert, Robyn Salley, and Jen Cash ("Castleberry on FB) retrieved the debris, which was stored at Jen's in the interim. Jim retrieved the engraved pieces and reconstructed that plate. Jill Leberknight recommended Clayton from her experience with him and Clay Smith made the negotiations. Sharon and Tom Porter cleaned up remaining debris from around the pillar. The result is shown here → Thanks to all these volunteers in the process, and apologies to any unmentioned.



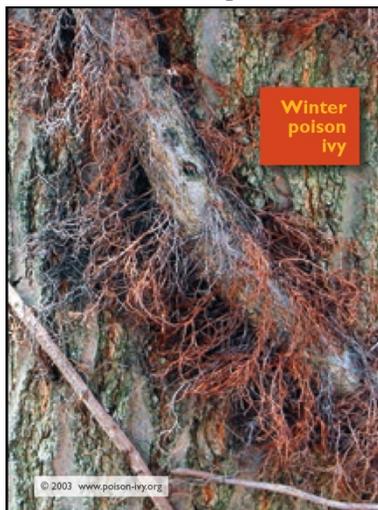
Our Neighborhood Chokepoint Relieved!

You know about it, even if you've only visited our neighborhood: The (barely two-lane) bridge over Skunk Creek on Covington, which is our only east-west passage (making it a favorite for cut-through traffic between I35 and North Lamar). If you drive it often, you know how constricted it was feeling before Sunday, Feb 7th, with the bushes, tree limbs and tall weeds pushing their way into the ROW. You couldn't pass another vehicle without having your car slapped upside the right fender/windows/doors. Many, if not most, cars would just wait until one coming from the opposite side passed before proceeding. And pedestrians were pushed out into the street and were hidden in or behind the growth, making crossing quite dangerous (actually, this is true even without the vegetation: We truly need a pedestrian bypass!). Perhaps it's because this is such an obviously dangerous passage that we've had so few accidents there; In the 54 years I've lived here I remember only one vehicle "in the creek".

So: It was a great relief to those of us who use the bridge regularly when a work party, organized on our Facebook group, lead by Neighborhood Watch members Luis Chapa and Tony Potts and including Eric Shaughnessy, Robert Meadows and others, showed up early on that Sunday morning to remove the offending foliage. Just as importantly, all the materials dumped in the creek were pulled out (special thanks to Eric - and to Jim Chim who also did this back in January; This has been a popular dumping point since it was built).

Luis took pictures before and after the cleanup – see Facebook - like the ones looking west shown here. Being winter, the "before" doesn't look nearly as "bushy" as it has been before leaves dropped, but the difference is striking: You can see cars and people well before you approach the bridge now! Thanks and well done to you, good neighbors!

In addition to the cleanup, 311 requests were made to replace reflectors and fix the non-working street light. The streetlight was actually fixed on the same day, including removal of limbs interfering with access and illumination!



Unfortunately, both Luis and Tony are allergic to poison ivy and are suffering because they didn't recognize its winter appearance and potency it exhibits at this time of year. You may have thought that this isn't poison ivy season, but you can experience its pleasures any time of the year. And it changes its appearance with season so you can't avoid it easily. The Walnut Bluffs Trail area is loaded with the stuff. Some of it is so old and big it forms small trees. Since those groups of three green leaves you depend on for identification are missing now you may feel relatively safe, but the winter plant is still potent and can be a much harder to recognize vine, as seen in the picture at left.

While the general shape of the leaves is the same for all varieties, the leaf edge can vary considerably, as seen above right. The shapes of the upper and lower right leaves are the most common around here, and we'll be seeing them emerge soon. In the Fall our leaves can become shades of red, yellow and brown, which can be quite attractive (see picture at right).



For more information see: <http://www.poison-ivy.org>.

Sorry Buyers, the Austin Metro is Sold-out of Houses

By Jill Leberknight, Walnut Creek Neighborhood Real Estate Expert

The Austin real estate scene gives me flashbacks to the “Cabbage Patch Doll” craze of my youth. Just insert “Austin Home” where you see the words “cabbage patch” in the following. “You want a ‘cabbage patch’ then you gotta take what you can get! We have a 200+ person waiting list for the ‘cabbage patch’ at every store in the city. No, you can’t choose the color, style or type of ‘cabbage patch.’ If a store gets one in stock and your name is called just come get your ‘cabbage patch!’”



16 years in the real estate business and I’ve never had to hunt for available homes in the same way my mother searched for a “cabbage patch doll” in 1983.

All kidding aside, the housing market is experiencing critically low inventory of historic proportions. Combined with the continued influx of relocations and buyers seeking low interest rates, home values are skyrocketing and the opportunity to realize the dream of homeownership in our Capital city metro is dwindling.

Since my last WCN newsletter the scene has only intensified. According to a January 2021 statistic announced by the Austin Board of Realtors the average price in Austin for a single family home is now \$455,000 up 19% from this time last year. We have less than 2 weeks’ worth of active inventory for current buyers, and our total sales dollar volume is up 58% from January last year.

As I head into what is normally peak selling season in March my buyers are facing a multiple-offer scene that is bringing the most experienced homeowners to tears. Minimum offers today require between 20%-35% over ask price with more popular homes, and neighborhoods like ours are seeing \$200,000+ over ask price, with FULL appraisal waiver (cash over appraisal shortages), thousands of dollars for the option to further inspect homes, as-is terms, free leasebacks, quick closes and more. Sellers on the other hand are firmly positioned as captain of this mother-may-I game. Buyers must have cash, creativity and an experienced real estate team in this market to survive, which is leaving many buyers left out of the Austin homeowner story.

The question I get asked more than any right now is “Is this a bubble, can Austin sustain this?”. My short answer is yes and no. But the long answer is more realistic. I don’t have a crystal ball but looking at the numbers and studying the data, trends, and listening to economic experts, this activity is not going away anytime soon. Austin has made a significant shift in the past 180 days with the announcement of Tesla and Oracle moving here. All data and trends point to a shift of a larger “Bay area” style market. There is a new price tag to living in Austin right now and price per square foot values are more in line with top metro cities like San Francisco and Boston. Prices will continue to rise as long as inventory remains low and confidence remains high in Austin’s future. Small bubbles and low points might come and go, much like they have in the Bay area, in the future (and as we head out of the pandemic) but also as residents face this new financial reality of Austin real estate. For many folks adding \$200,000-\$250,000 cash over an already nearly half-million-dollar loan just to have 4 walls in Austin is not within their comfort level.

As for our Walnut Creek Neighborhood: We are seeing some of the highest prices we’ve ever seen for our least improved original condition properties. Our ideal location between Apple, Samsung, and even the new Tesla Plant is keeping demand high. And then you add our large lots, mature trees, and quick access to amenities & more buyers are willing to pay top dollar to live here. For years I have been telling neighbors that we have not maxed out and values will likely only rise but this particular market is so strong that it is creating additional benefits for sellers that I have never seen, from year-long, free leasebacks giving sellers time to plan their next move to unprecedented cash offers for the right to lay claim on Austin land. But with this Wild West scene we are seeing a variety of scams and misrepresentations that are costing money, causing stress and leaving sellers up in the air after weeks of moving plans. As with any hot market homeowners should be cautious of any opportunity that looks too good to be true.

I am encouraging residents to start planning now for increased property appraisals over the next several years. I will be sharing news and updates for 2021 property-appraisal-protest support at the WCN annual meeting on March 30th. After our 2020 appraisal freeze of values I fear this dramatic increase in values will catch many residents off guard, and we should strategize now. Remember, we all win when all or most of us participate in the property protest process, as neighborhood values influence each other. Together we can help keep our values as fair as possible.

I look forward to sharing updates on this extreme market and its effects on home values.

March Bird Report by Jen Bristol

They say March roars in like a lion - I say March flies in like a hummingbird. The Ruby-throated (see Jen's picture, right) and Black-chinned Hummingbirds are some of the first migrants to arrive in our area and some of the most exciting birds to watch from the comfort and safety of your own home. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds make the leap of faith as they launch from the Yucatan and other parts of Central America to fly with no stops across the Gulf of Mexico. Some travel overland across Mexico as they fan out across the United States and Canada, east of the Rocky Mountains to nest and breed. Some Ruby's choose to nest right here in Austin.



Black-chinned Hummingbirds winter in Mexico and parts of South Texas and migrate across the southwestern and western states, with many staying in Central Texas to nest. While we see plenty in Austin, the greater concentrations are west of here. The bird blind at Pedernales Falls State Park is a great place to see them in mid-March and April. If you are visiting a State Park this spring it is best to go online to get a day pass to guarantee your entrance into the park that day. With so many more people living in Central Texas the Hill Country State Parks are busier than ever, especially once the flowers bloom.

So how can you attract hummingbirds to your yard? Planting a variety of native plants that bloom in the spring and in the fall is the best way to provide these pollinators a good source of nectar and aphids. Aphids are tiny bugs that the hummers eat as a source of protein. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are most attracted to red flowers such as red yucca, red Turk's cap, and salvias. You can visit the National Audubon's website - Plants for Birds - and put in your zip code to find more native plant suggestions. I like to buy my plants from local nurseries instead of big box stores.

When feeding the hummingbirds, please **Do Not** buy the food that has red food coloring in it. The red dye is harmful to the birds and I am surprised they continue to sell it. You can make your own nectar by using refined white sugar (do not use brown sugar) and water: mix 1 cup of sugar to 4 cups of water. You can scale that up or down by using the 1 to 4 ratio. I use warm water to help dilute the sugar faster. I also wipe the feeder down, so the sugar isn't on it which helps cut down on attracting bees. Yes, you might get some bees coming to the feeder, especially before flowers are in full bloom. If they continue to use your feeder, make sure it doesn't leak or consider moving it. If you put out a feeder make sure you clean it frequently. Also make sure you hang it away from windows (to prevent males from attacking their reflection) and out of reach of cats.

The first hummingbirds should be arriving soon, with waves to follow as the winds are right to carry them north. I hope you consider planting native plants and putting out a feeder to bring these tiny, fascinating feathered friends to your yard this Spring. To find more about birds in our "Neighborwoods" check out www.theatomiccowgirl.com or pick up a copy of *Parking Lot Birding: A Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas*. Happy Birding!

Uri: What a Hit We Took!

Energy production and distribution is extremely complex, probably more so in Texas than elsewhere. The storms of 14 – 17 February 2021, here collectively called Uri, produced the most severe test of Texas' energy infrastructure in history, producing daily high temperatures in Austin below freezing for five successive days starting on Feb 12th (the low temperature was below freezing for 9 successive days, and below 10 degrees on 14th, 15th and 16th. Austin was warned about rolling blackouts late on Valentine's night, and power was shut down in areas around the city the next morning. Many parts of Austin were without power for weeks, while some areas never lost power.

Then we got the warning about low water levels in the reserve reservoirs, caused by a tree falling on power lines at the substation supplying electricity to the pumps at the Ullrich Water Treatment Plant, the main source for Austin. This situation was likely to lead to water cutoffs and a boil-water condition, which happened soon thereafter. As with power, whether your own water got cut off also depended on where you lived, and some people didn't have safe water many weeks later. Water pressure dropped precipitously everywhere, but a trickle continued in place.

The explanations for all this came in from many directions by many sources, and included TV appearances by the CEO of ERCOT and his top manager, explaining what they did and why. The local blackouts were necessary to prevent a major failure in Texas' supply/distribution system, which could have taken weeks or months to correct.

Here's my take, from reading from many sources on all sides of the issue:

By Railroad Commission rules, in very cold conditions the natural gas supply must have home/business/industry heating as its top priority. The extreme cold at the start of the "event" was making getting gas out of the ground and through cold valves and the electrical pumps difficult to impossible (Texas providers have very little above-ground storage capability). Meanwhile the same weather was causing power plants to drop offline, reducing or eliminating power to these gas providers. This spiral continued until power available on the Texas Grid dropped to a point that ERCOT had to reduce demand, i.e. consumption by wholesale and local power providers (Austin Power is both of these), to match the rapidly decreasing supply. ERCOT has the ability to make these providers reduce demand by regions in the state: They declare the amount each region must reduce – usually by a similar percentage

of power in each region – to maintain instantaneous balance between supply and demand, which is necessary to prevent the major failure mentioned above.

Each of the regions then decides how to perform the necessary rolling blackouts to achieve the reductions. Each area has its own priorities for this process, based on undisclosed criteria, with control determined by locations of substations where power can be cut off. The map used by Austin Energy was made public recently, shown on the Advertisers page below and at <https://is.gd/mBigvX>. You can see what your area's priority is if you enlarge and study the map. AE has not identified what institutions actually produce the priorities, but it has been speculated that we were protected by the Oracle communication complex north of CVS.

Let's hope/demand that the post-mortem of this event reveals more and leads to improvement in our infrastructure!

Time Capsule by the Creek

The past 12 months have been extraordinary for so many reasons-an election! a pandemic! a social justice movement! record home sales! growing families! an unprecedented weather event! We would like your help in documenting this moment in time for future residents of the Walnut Creek community. Our neighborhood is evolving - we have original residents, second-generation neighbors, and new families. We would love to gather your perspective on the past year - narratives and pictures. This will be compiled and put in a time capsule to be opened in 2030. This is your chance to share with your future self, your future family, your future community how we came together to survive and grow stronger. To participate:

1. Answer the questions and writing prompts below. Be sure to include a picture with your submission! You can submit either online (<https://forms.gle/XkWp3QL6HUQSgkfj8>), to wcnanews@gmail.com or on paper.
2. If you choose a physical submission, call [512.731.6863](tel:512.731.6863) to have your submission picked up, or mail it to WCNA at the address below.
3. Your submission compiled and included in the time capsule.
4. The capsule will be entombed for years to come.
5. In 2030, the secrets of the past will be unveiled to future generations.

To be included, please respond to one or all of the writing prompts and submit up to 3 photos in one of the following ways:

- **Online:** <https://forms.gle/XkWp3QL6HUQSgkfj8>
- **Email:** wcnanews@gmail.com
- **Call:** [512.731.6863](tel:512.731.6863)
- **Mail:** PO Box 82746 Austin, TX 78708-2746

We look forward to this unique opportunity to share a piece of the past with our future selves and neighbors!
Thank you for participating!

Identification: (*Required):

Name*	Email &/or Phone Number*	
Address*	Members of Household	Year you Moved to Neighborhood

Writing Prompts (choose one or all!):

1. How has living in the neighborhood changed since you moved in?
2. The past 12 months have been extraordinary. Tell future generations what it looked like for you-the good, the bad, the ugly.
3. Of all the events over the past 12 months, which had the biggest impact on you and why?
4. Tell us about your favorite neighbors, past and present, and what made them special to you.
5. What are your dreams for the future? How do you envision Walnut Creek in 2030?

Please include a photo with your submission to mark this moment in time! Photo ideas: A picture of your household in front of your house, a picture of a tree you recently planted, a photo of your home in the snow, a photo of your home as it looked when you originally moved in. You can also email your images to WCNAnews@gmail.com. Please be sure to include your full name with your email.

**Please note that physical submissions may not be able to be returned.

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Austin Ballot for 1 May 2021 City Election

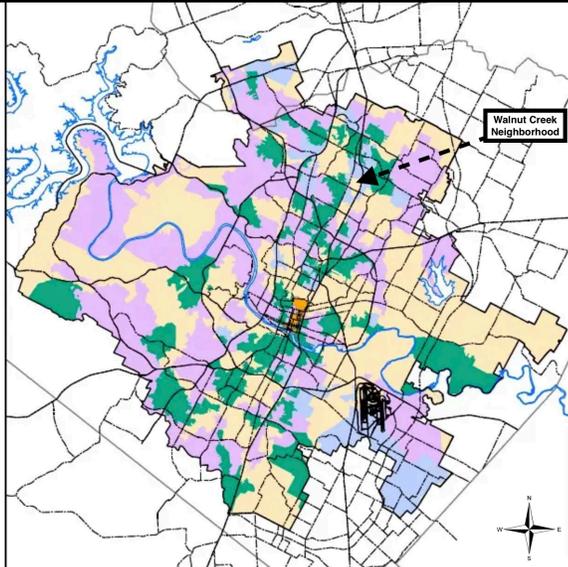
Last day to register: 1 April;

First day to vote early: 19 April

Eleven propositions for bond issues: affordable housing, cultural & creative facilities, public parks etc, flood mitigation, public health facility in Dove Springs, public safety infrastructure, streets/sidewalks/etc, and four city government/procedural issues. Start here: <http://austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=307013>

Eight propositions for various issues: A. Require city to participate in binding arbitration with Firefighters Association; B. City camping ban issue: re-instate penalties for camping; C. Allow Office of Police Oversight to be more independent; D. Change the date of the mayoral election to coincide with the presidential election; E. Create “ranked-choice” voting for city elections; F. Change city structure to “strong mayor-council” with no city manager; G. Add an 11th council district if strong mayor is adopted (to maintain an odd number of council members, as mayor would no longer be a member); H. Adopt a public campaign finance program, providing a \$25 voucher for each registered voter to contribute to candidate of choice in city elections.

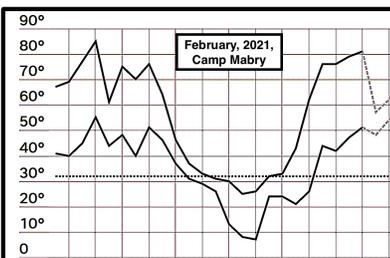
Details: <https://www.austintexas.gov/news/council-orders-elections-eight-propositions-may-1-2021>



AE Distribution Circuit
Plan for Load Reduction
August 8, 2011

- Load Shed Circuits
- Industrial/Dual Circuits
- Critical Load Circuits
- Under Frequency Circuits
- Downtown Network
- Austin Energy Service Area
- Street Centerline

AUSTIN ENERGY
08/08/2011
This map has been produced by Austin Energy for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.



The top (green bar) legend above refers to areas who will lose power first: Load Shed Circuits. The tan bar – third down – will obviously keep power as long as possible. We're that color (note arrow).

Don't forget to vote in Austin City Election; Saturday, May 1st!

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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 \$15 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 wca.contact@gmail.com or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620.

Calendar of Events

Mar	12-21	SXSW online 2021 - https://www.sxsw.com
	13-27	Austin Rodeo - https://rodeoaustin.com
	14	Daylight Savings Time Begins-Spring forward one hour
	15-19	AISD Spring Break
	17	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	20	First Day of Spring
	27-28	Austin Kite Festival - https://www.abckitefest.org
	30	WCNA Annual Meeting- Follow social media for up-to-date details
	31	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Apr	4	Easter
	10	Cap10k - https://www.cap10k.com
	14	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	22	Earth Day Austin - https://earthdayaustin.com
	24	Eeyore's Birthday Party - http://eeyores.org
	27	Take Back Drug Day- https://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drug_disposal/takeback/
	28	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
May	1	City of Austin Special Election: VOTE
	3	Bulk Item Collection-Starts Monday and goes until all is collected.
	5	Cinco de Mayo
	9	Mother's Day