



Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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

Mar
Apr
2022

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WCNA Annual / General Meeting “Zoomed” Again

The Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association held its annual General Meeting by Zoom on Tuesday, 22 February 2022, 6 to 8 pm. This meeting is required by the bylaws of the Association, and is ordinarily held during the first four months of the year. A peak of 30 participants attended, not counting the City of Austin officials.

The meeting opened with a PowerPoint presentation about the Association, detailing the activities of the Association in the recent past, currently underway, and planned for the future. This presentation is a good reminder of what your neighborhood association is about (community-building) and how it's going about it. You will be able to view it on the neighborhood's Facebook page, Nextdoor page, and

website in the near future (see links for these in the box to the left).

The meeting continued with the Treasurer's report. In 2021, the Association received about \$4600 (\$2200 dues, \$280 donations to the park, \$1700 general donations, and \$370 donated to the Walnut Creek Cat Coalition), and spent about \$3626 (\$226 for the PO box, \$2000 for the newsletter, and \$1400 to rebuild the “Eubank Acres” pillar), for a surplus of about \$1000, the first significant surplus in years (all figures are rounded). Among several reasons, this is a function of the exact timing of the reporting period, and also the reduced expenditures during the pandemic.

The meeting then proceeded with the **election of Board members**, who serve for a two-year period. As of the date of the General Meeting, there were 14 Board members, i.e., Directors. Luis Chapa is leaving the Board because he is leaving the neighborhood. Sara Breuer, Colin Haymes, Siobhan Blackburn, and James Miller were in the middle of their two-year terms and thus were carried over. Jill Leberknight, Bunnie and Dorsey Twidwell (Co-Directors), Tasha Bowser, Theresa Jones, Clay Smith, Pat Pitt, Robert Meadows, Sara Merrell, and Karen Watkins were standing for re-election to another two-year term and were re-elected by the membership in attendance. Melissa Huber was standing for election as a new Board member and was elected by the membership in attendance. Melissa also is taking the place of Luis as the liaison between the Board and the Safety Team. The Board thus continues to have 14 members going forward.

The **Safety Team** then made a short presentation to acquaint the membership with its role, function, and activities. Charter and block map handouts were provided, and these will be posted at the sites mentioned above. Christian Ninaud (512-971-7628, mtbrider007@yahoo.com) is now the primary point of contact for the neighborhood.

A presentation subsequently was made on the progress of the **trail construction at the Walnut Bluffs Trailhead**. This presentation took the form of a PowerPoint deck presented by Genest Landry, the City of Austin Project Manager for this project. Ana Sievert from the City of Austin was also in attendance. This deck will be posted at the sites as mentioned above. Basically, the trail leg from the Trailhead entrance to North Lamar will be completed by April, 2022, when we'll once again be able to use the main trail as in the past, but with a wide concrete walkway. Construction also continues on the west side of North Lamar in the Walnut Creek Metropolitan Park.

Jill Leberknight then spoke about “Biscuits and Coffey” events. Jill used to perform with the Biscuit Brothers, as the character Buttermilk Biscuit (there is a Wikipedia entry for the Biscuit Brothers, as well as an eponymous website, to which the reader is referred for background). Beth Coffey is a resident of the neighborhood. The two have been making videos about the neighborhood, both in a talk show format and also in an “out-and-about” format, on landscaping and backyard design features. They are posted to YouTube, Nextdoor and Facebook (not all on each).

Finally, Jill spoke about the upcoming property protest season, making the point that information pooled by the neighborhood is a potent tool for dealing with rising property appraisals; see her agenda and schedule below.

The meeting then adjourned. The meeting was recorded, and this recording will be edited into segments and posted, (probably) to YouTube.

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Ukraine. I can't stop thinking about it. And if I do, the news brings it right back. Can this really be happening? 77 years after World War II? I'm not ignorant; I know war in some form is always going on somewhere, and it can be as brutal as this one has already become. After all, it's being waged by the Russians, the same people who indiscriminately bomb Syrian civilians trying to avoid their brutal dictator Bashar Al Assad, for whom there's no such thing as a war crime. Myanmar; China/Tibet; Iran/Iraq; and so on...

But these aren't the Europeans who agreed not to do this anymore.

But wait: Did Russia not join in that agreement after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Unfortunately, as has been shown over and over, joining the United Nations doesn't involve an agreement not to be an untethered bully and killer.

More notable: All the "wars" mentioned are/have been waged by authoritarians. Dictators. Autocrats. Etc.

This doesn't mean we democratic countries can't be bloody-minded, but for 77 years we have avoided it toward "each other" by agreement, because of WW II, the development of nuclear weapons and (dare I say it?) morality (maybe?).

Even with satellites watching and cell phones recording, as well as all the other intelligence sensors we have, dictator Putin is waging a ground war against a peaceful European country peopled by close relatives of his own population. This just won't compute for me. And I can't get it far enough out of my mind to concentrate for very long.

When the wind is from a southeasterly direction at night I'm frequently trying to go to sleep hearing commercial aircraft passing overhead on a glidepath to land at Austin-Bergstrom. Every time this happens now I think that if I were in Ukraine I would be tensed up under my bed expecting a bomb or missile to hit on or close to me. It takes a while after each plane I hear to get to sleep. ***Slava Ukraini!*** (This phrase was illegal in the Soviet Union).

Here is a short treatise about the insanity of war, with accompanying cartoons. Worth the 2 or 3 minutes it takes to read: <https://www.upworthy.com/cartoon-illustrates-the-human-cost-of-war?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1>

It might be noted that the same analysis can be applied to our polarized politics. This may be as hard to disrupt as our human addiction to war. We must not give up trying. *By Pat Pitt, editor*

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2022 Property Appraisal Festival of Sharing

By Jill Leberknight, WCN Real Estate Expert

2022 property appraisal season is upon us and for those of you who are new to the Walnut Creek Neighborhood this means the beginning of our annual property protest FESTIVAL OF SHARING. Okay, so we don't actually have a festival but much like my passion for holiday caroling the property appraisal process is one of the things I "geek out" on. So let me kick off this season of sharing with an overview of news, information, and tips

► **Delivery & due dates** - Rollout of Travis County appraisal notices begin April 1st but can take several days to reach our area. Our neighborhood usually receives them all at about the same time so it is helpful for neighbors to share when they receive their notice so we can all be on the lookout and not miss the delivery. We may also need to plan a happy hour at Santorini's to collectively support each other as we digest our appraisal. Home values have seen a 23% increase during the appraisal year with average sales up \$107,000.

► **Protest format** - 2022 protest format should remain the same as 2021 with the informal hearing taking place via an online option and formal hearings held via phone conferencing.

► **Protest workshop dates** - I will hold my annual property appraisal protest workshops **Wednesday April 27th**. WCN neighbor Beth Coffey will host us at Trinity Title, 8303 MoPac Expy A-100, Austin, TX 78759. We will have both in-person and live Zoom feed for this event. Join Zoom Meeting: Meeting ID: 829 7341 9654, Passcode: 17521 <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82973419654?pwd=OGZGbXpJNEZ2WTZneWh4L2lRZl4dz09>

► **Gather Evidence of Property Condition & Estimates for Repairs** - while we wait for notices, I recommend obtaining estimates and condition reports that support your protest value. I will train neighbors on what evidence is acceptable to the appraisal review board (ARB) and Travis Central Appraisal District (TCAD). I have been coaching our community for over a decade on how to approach the annual property tax process and I will continue the mission to ensure homeowners know their rights and empower you to navigate the process with information and facts. Knowledge is power. The county appraisal process is designed to be equal and uniform so cooperating and collaborating together benefits us all.

► **Communication Threads** - Otherwise known as our "Festival of Sharing" will begin on all social media platforms. This is our WCN tradition of learning together. No news, tip, or experience is too small. I will initiate threads at every phase of the process and share what I am learning in the field.

► **Homestead reminder** - Teacher Jill is strongly recommending all new residents and those who have not yet filed for their Texas homestead to take this time to exercise your right as a Texas homeowner and receive your savings benefit from obtaining homestead status for your primary residence. i8

And for those that like to join me in expanding your knowledge of this process I am pleased with the improvements TCAD has made to their website resources and educational materials. Visit them here. <https://traviscad.org/protests>

The Walnut Creek Cat Coalition: Are You a Cat Person?

In the summer of 2007 a family living at the corner of Covington and Oakwood moved. They had been “collecting” cats for years, apparently without having any spayed or neutered, and the resulting cat colony numbered in the 20s. Whether they took any with them when they left is unknown, but most of them remained in the vicinity of the house where they had been fed. To several of us who had been noticing the kittens, this looked like a catastrophe (pardon the pun) in progress. With 20-odd intact feral cats in the same area, even more kittens would be inevitable. (As it turned out, most of these cats had been birthed by one female, black with some white markings.) A group of us met and formed a neighborhood organization – The Walnut Creek Cat Coalition - with the immediate goal of making all these cats and kittens “street legal”, which meant getting them spayed or neutered and vaccinated for rabies, then returning them to their colony and providing food and water. This procedure, called “Trap/Neuter/Return/Maintain”, was - and is - a movement that was growing in the U. S. and other countries. The concept is that such colonies typically self-limit, as the members tend to keep new cats from joining, though this is not highly dependable. Thus, when all members are sterilized the size of a colony would tend to stabilize, and then decrease from members roaming, disease and predation (by dogs and coyotes in this area, for example). The “maintain” part of the name means to provide food for the colony, and we set up a “feeding station” for our initial colony right at the start. In fact a colony must be on a feeding schedule to assure identification and TNR of all members.

Since they were essentially ferals – no one could touch them – getting them fixed would require trapping them and taking them to a veterinary operation which would handle such cats. The city had a voucher program that would pay for this process at clinics willing to handle feral cats, and so had a list of willing vets in town. The vouchers were hard to get because the number was small relative to the need: There were a small but growing number of trappers in town doing this work and mostly financing it however they could raise the money, mostly paying for the procedures themselves. We decided to finance “processing” most or all of this colony ourselves, and Balcones Animal Hospital agreed to do it at the same price they did for the city. We bought traps and began the program, using a city voucher when we could get one and occasionally soliciting for funds from neighbors.

Shortly after we started, we decided to ask the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association if it would be willing to match our donated funds up to \$500 so we could assure all the cats got treated, and WCNA agreed to do this, on the concept that it was performing a service for the neighborhood; i.e., preventing many more feral kittens from being produced. By the time the match was reached most of the cats in the colony had been treated and the city had changed their program. Meanwhile the project was accepted for sponsorship by WCNA; i.e., anyone wishing to donate to WCCC can do so through the same process as paying dues or donating to any WCNA project, by designating so on the payment “coupon” from the newsletter or by choosing the category (sorry) when using PayPal. With regard to the City feral cat operation (now called the “Community Cat” program), using a grant from PetSmart a program was established which allowed trappers to take ferals to the Austin Humane Society (on 183/Research just west of IH35) on “clinic days”, where a surgery staff would spay or neuter each cat/kitten, give rabies vaccinations and apply flea medication at no cost to the trapper. A cat could be picked up late that afternoon after sufficient recovery from anesthesia and taken to an appropriate recovery place or released back to the spot where it was trapped. The program assumes that a cat will be fed as long as it remains near where it was trapped. WCCC started using this program the instant it started, and within about three years all the colonies that we knew about in the neighborhood had passed through it. Occasionally, individual or small numbers of cats still are put through the program, which has now been expanded to take any “unhomed” cat (i.e., they no longer have to be ferals). You can take a cat in yourself through the AHS program:

<https://austinhumanesociety.org/programs/community-cat-program/>

In WCCC's second year we worked a colony with two mamas and about 10 kittens. At the time we had use of a neighborhood house that was not occupied, and we decided to keep a couple of older cats who had injuries there, and also the passle of kittens in order to get them adopted (taking them to the city “pound” at the time was usually a death sentence). More special needs cats and kittens followed, many adopted but many not, mostly because they were too old when trapped to socialize sufficiently with the volunteer effort we had. We still have many of these cats today, though we have lost many to fatal disease, mostly cancer. They're all older cats now (13 – 15 years old) and will be with us until the end. We stopped taking any more in when we had to worry about any outliving us, the volunteers.

We still TNR neighborhood cats, which is free when certified trappers do it, but we're down to two trappers with very limited availability. If you would like to become a trapper with us or just learn how to trap, contact Pat Pitt (512-837-6620), s.pitt@earthlink.net. We have the trapping equipment and experience. We've TNR'ed at least 150 cats from this neighborhood and even more than this in other neighborhoods where we've helped AHS trappers. *by Pat Pitt*



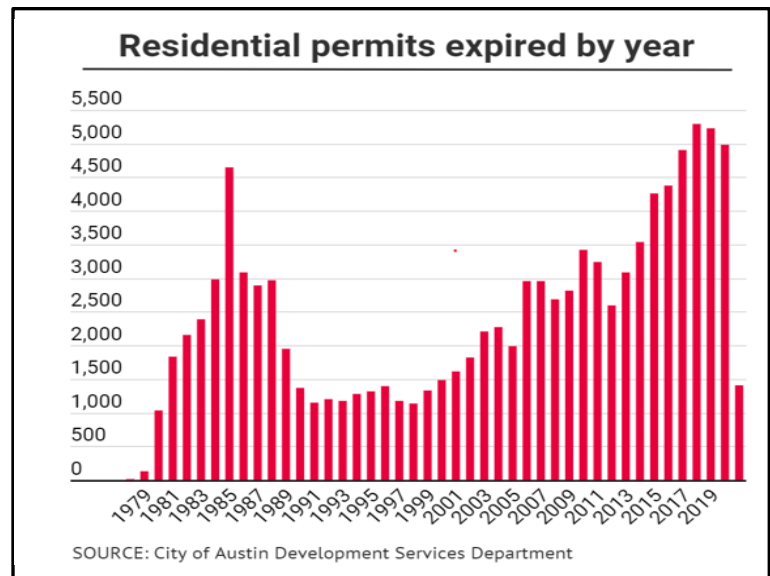
Peaches, our blind kitty

Do You Have an Expired Building Permit With the City?

Many – probably most – of us homeowners have had work done that required a permit from the city (see <https://www.austintexas.gov/permittingatx/residential-toolkit/can-i-get-a-permit>). Most projects of any significance require one, designated for a particular project: Building Permit (BP), Mechanical Permit (MP), Electrical Permit (EP) or Plumbing Permit (PP). Some of us have “pulled” our permit personally, but most jobs are performed by contractors who get the permit themselves. These permits are tied to the address, and require a final inspection to “clear”; i.e., an inspector for the type of project must look at it and sign off to complete the process. Permits are issued for 180 days, though they can be extended by request for some period depending on the type. If an inspector doesn’t sign off, the process isn’t officially completed and the permit expires. Then this status remains on file at the Development Services Department. If you have such a permit the city may not issue a new permit on your home, at least not for similar work. You will/may have to resolve the issue to start another project, and this can involve fees and/or additional work (e.g., expose buried or hidden plumbing for inspection). At the least, additional time and effort will be required.

The number of expired permits has been rising more rapidly since the late 1990s, up to more than 1500 in 2018. At the end of 2021 there were about 70,000 homes with more than 107,000 expired permits.

KXAN ran a good story on this (<https://www.kxan.com/investigations/they-never-go-away-austin-homes-have-more-than-100k-expired-permits-could-yours-be-one/>) last November, and they included a very handy interactive map with the podcast. If you don’t know whether your home may have an expired permit, you can check quickly on the map. Expand the map as indicated when you try to use your scroll wheel; It quickly expands (move it using click/hold) to allow you to find your address. If there is a red dot on your address you have an expired permit: click on it to get the description of the expired permit.



It's Bird Migration Time Again: Please Turn Off Outdoor Lights During Flying Hours

One in three North American migratory birds flies through Texas during Spring migration! 80% of these birds migrate at night, and Austin is one of the busiest flyways in the U.S.. Millions of these birds are lost during migration, many because of encountering artificial lighting during their passage. Outside lighting can obscure the starlight used for navigation and cause collisions with buildings because of the visual confusion it produces. Artificial light sources can also affect their timing, causing them to migrate too early or too late.

The full Spring migration period is 1 March – 15 June, with the most critical period from 22 April – 12 May. You can help reduce bird losses during these periods by turning off outdoor lighting between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., and by making outdoor lighting required for security motion-activated and/or directed downward.

The full Fall period is 15 Aug. – 30 Nov., with the most critical period 5 Sep. – 29 Oct.

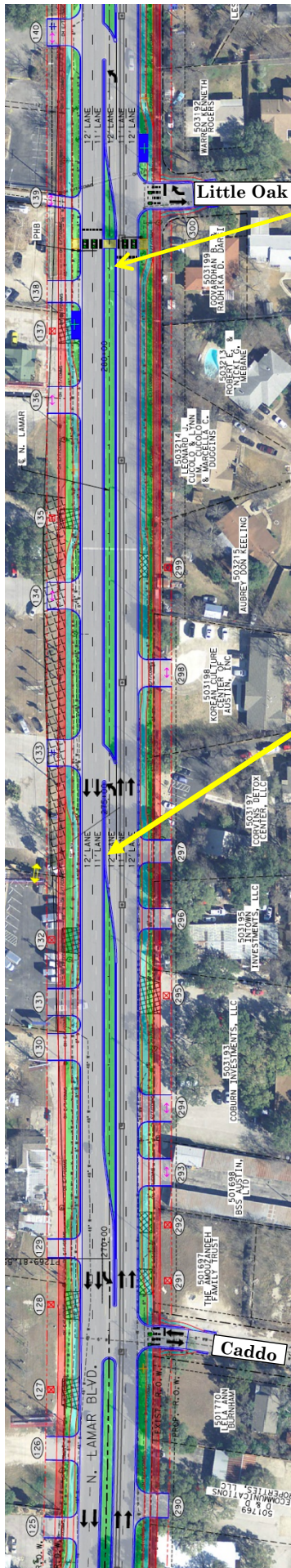
Learn much more about this at <https://texanbynature.org/projects/lights-out-texas/>.

Tony's Jamaican Food Emporium Still in the Works!!

We've been salivating ever since we heard that Tony and Kimberly Scott were planning a Jamaican food venture right here in the neighborhood. It looked like things might fall through for awhile, but they now have the property – 11700 N. IH35 - and are working hard to get the business open to the public. They've overcome most of the bureaucratic problems new Austin businesses frequently have, and are steadily moving toward a **Grand Opening** which they hope to have **mid-Summer**. Their sign is on the side of the building facing the two-way street that runs between Sandpiper and Meadowlark beside the I-35 Frontage road, where the entrance to the “store” will be. So it can be reached from either Sandpiper or Meadowlark. The “Park” will be in the open area to the north of the building. And we can't wait to have a party to welcome them to the 'hood!



Here's proof: Tony's sign on the building!



Medians Are Coming on North Lamar!

One section of the “map-drawings” of improvements to North Lamar under the 2016 Mobility Bond (i.e., already funded) is shown to the left. **Medians** are the main features, shown as light green strips outlined in blue in the center of Lamar, oriented with north up. This shows only the stretch from just below Caddo to above Little Oak, providing just enough magnification to see most features (legends at bottom). This is the current plan, with changes still possible.

The concept of medians is to eliminate the “chicken lane” we now deal with regularly. With increasing daily traffic and the addition of more businesses with significant traffic on both sides of Lamar, the opportunities for head-on collisions is increasing rapidly. On the other hand, the “fix” - medians with **left-turn cutouts** - limits the places where a vehicle can turn left into a side street or parking area. Thus organizations that aren’t at or very near a left turn cutout will be harder to reach from the other side of the street, requiring a U-turn at the next cutout.

As you can see here, Little Oak, near the top, has no left turn cutout when approaching from the north, so getting to Little Oak for southbound drivers will require making a U-turn at Caddo and going back: Caddo does have a left turn cutout.

It was decided to put left-turn capability for northbound traffic to reach all four of the religious institutions on the west side of Lamar north of Little Oak. North Bend and “Santorini” also get left turn lanes for northbound traffic.

Coming from the north (southbound) the left turn breaks are at *On The Green*, Oakbrook, Caddo, the North Bend intersection, and Braker.

Free Antiviral treatment available

Starting around the middle of March, pharmacies who provide Covid testing will be able to give any person who tests positive the Pfizer antiviral Paxlovid tablets on the spot. If given early in an infection these pills have been found to be about 89% effective at preventing hospitalization among people at highest risk of developing severe illness. This initiative is called “Test to Treat”, and is being implemented at pharmacies and community health centers (Austin Public Health sites) which have a qualified pharmacist. Also, families can order more Covid test kits, four per order and up to two orders, at this time.

Walnut Creek Elementary’s Lisa Richardson is a finalist for AISD Teacher of the Year!

Austin Independent School District has named four finalists for the honor, and it’s easy to see why Ms. Richardson is one of them when you learn her bonafides. She is a bilingual 2nd-grade teacher, a daughter of immigrants and was a volunteer for a center which worked with refugees facing injustices in the U.S. Her volunteer experiences led her to the teaching profession, where she works to end disparities faced by black and brown students within the education system. She also is an effective writer for grants and donations, which helps with material support for all teachers.

The final selection will be announced on-line on 20 May, at [virtual awards ceremony](#).

Here’s to you, Lisa!

Leslie Pool, may have to run again after only two years!

Remember redistricting last year? So, our District 7 boundaries have changed. Accordingly, some people whose Council Rep wasn’t on the ballot two years ago have been moved into our district (7). Pool was re-elected in 2020, so won’t be up for again until 2024. So these “new” people that didn’t vote two years ago won’t get to vote for their rep for 6 years (horrors!). A suit has been filed on behalf of all such Austinites, demanding that **all** council members run for office this year so no one will wait more than four years to vote on their representative. Thus Pool and three others elected 2 years ago would only serve two years before being up for re-election again. (This happened to five of the council members elected in the first election after our 10-1 council system was established, but it was because those five drew “short straws”.) So which is worse: perhaps 24,000 residents having to wait two extra years to vote for their rep, or five council reps having to run twice in four years? Waiting costs nothing for the approximately 30% of the 24,000 who “typically” vote in council elections, but campaigns can cost a great deal of money.

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Happy Hour
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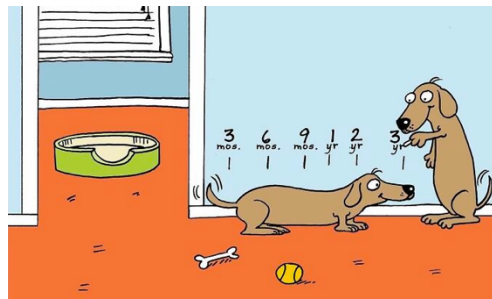


Jill Leberknight
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In case folks don't know..if you send a self addressed stamped envelope to the Live Monarch Foundation, they will send you milkweed seeds native to your area for free!



I don't usually brag about going to expensive places, but I just left the gas station.



You don't say...



Ongoing Construction at Walnut Bluffs Park
Concrete pumping hose allows pouring at long distances!

Warning: Use Zelle at Your Own Risk!

Zelle (<https://tinyurl.com/0nelz22>) is a popular money transfer app, similar to Venmo but much more popular. It's free, fast and convenient (note: your institution may charge a fee for using it). But it has a serious fault: There's no way of stopping a transaction once it's initiated. The transaction can happen instantaneously and is considered "authorized" by you, since only you can instigate its use. Unless you lose your phone, or it's stolen, or it's hacked. If this happens the banks will do nothing to help recover your money. Most payment cards have a built-in delay, and most institutions provide some protection for your transactions. But Zelle, Venmo and CashApp should be used only between you and someone you know well. And preferably from a separate account with a relatively small amount of money in it. Crooks have been known to drain a payee's account virtually instantaneously.

Here's what it says on Zelle's website: "If your recipient has already enrolled with Zelle, the money is sent directly to your recipient's bank account and cannot be canceled."

Free Tests and Antiviral Now at Pharmacies!

PRSRT STD.
US POSTAGE
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PERMIT #986

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 or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620.

Mar	12-26	Austin Rodeo
	13	Daylight Savings Time Begins-Spring forward one hour
	14-18	AISS Spring Break
	14-20	SXSW Music Festival
	16	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	17	St. Patrick's Day
	20	First Day of Spring
	25-27	Austin Spring Home & Garden Show
	30	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
Apr	3	Austin Kite Festival
	10	Capitol 10K
	13	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	17	Easter
	22	Earth Day Austin
	24	Eeyore's Birthday Party
	27	Jill Leberknight's Property Protest Workshop (see article on second page)
	27	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	30	Take Back Drug Day
May	5	Cinco de Mayo
	7-8	Pecan Street Festival
	8	Mother's Day
	11	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	15	Total Lunar Eclipse