

Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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

May June 2022

Join Us!

Dues information is shown in this newsletter on the back page beside vour 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

Make a Note of This Date: July 4th, 2022 (don't forget!)

Got it? That's the day you're invited to join your neighbors – again - as we celebrate Independence Day in the neighborhood with a **community parade** and **potluck picnic**. Time: ~11:00a.m. start of the parade.

Kay and Joel Klumpp started this tradition in 2012 with only a few days of preparation/notice. They providedand cooked - hot dogs with fixin's, and neighbors brought many amazing side dishes. And the turnout was amazing! Sometimes spontaneity works best!

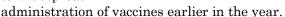
In the following years the Klumpps have hosted the party/parade six more times, with a shift to Christian and Luzdary Ninaud's yard in 2016 and Covid shutting things down in 2020. So this will be the tenth annual Independence Day celebratory parade and potluck picnic in the neighborhood in eleven July Fourths. Participation has generally increased



Bagpiper Philip Bates leads at the start of last year's parade.

each year, with the 2021 parade the biggest, stimulated by a pent-up desire to get out of the house and a decrease in the level of Covid thanks to widespread

Alice & Ada Scout & Bubble last year before the parade



Unless otherwise notified via messaging on Facebook, Nextdoor and/or WCNAnews.com, the procedure will be the same as in previous years: Assembly of tables, chairs, food. etc. will start

about 10:00 a.m. Typically the parade will start about 11:00 a.m., or whenever the leader gives the signal (we're hoping this again will be neighbor/bagpiper Philip Bates). The paraders always include young kids to old f----olks, all trying to keep up. It's a glorious event with even more meaning this "war" year, and always brings fun and Come join in the fun! (remember that date!) fellowship to the community.

Almost There: The Walnut Bluffs Concrete Trail Will Soon Be a Reality

At the time of this publication, our longanticipated, ADA-compliant, concrete-paved park trail nears completion. It's even possible that, by the time you read this, all the concrete will be poured on "our side" of Lamar. The entry there will be the last section completed to provide the 12-ft wide, hard-surface thoroughfare through Walnut Bluffs Trailhead, following the trail initially established by Gary Brewer in the early 2000s. It will allow almost anybody wishing to visit our little paradise to do so under most weather conditions, whether by foot, bicycle, wheelchair or other conveyance not engine powered. Twelve feet is wide enough to allow safe passing of two bicycles (assuming both riders know and follow the rules of etiquette), demonstrating how this project is also part of Austin's mobility plan and not simply a park and



The New Path: Leading from the trailhead entrance to the "turnaround" circle behind Gary Brewer. Still can't go beyond the orange fence there at present.

recreation space. It won't be used for through-transit for a while, though, as it ends with the circle near our Oakbrook entrance, just visible back behind Gary in the picture above (look closely!).

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Gary on the ADA-compliant slope down to the creek past the power lines: significant excavation required to flatten the path.

No doubt there are those of us, especially some long-time users of the park, who prefer walking on the softer natural paths, and most of the paths which criss-cross the area will remain such. And WCNA will continue to help with maintenance of most of these trails in cooperation with the city parks department. This will include working toward

reducing invasive plant species and planting native ones suited to the particular environment of our park.

The "Walnut Creek Trail" has been "in the works" for nearly 40 years, mostly under the Public Works



Watch out for Poison Ivy, especially very near the natural footpaths in our park.

Department. The larger project comprises a network of similar pathways which ultimately will circle Austin and facilitate alternative forms of mobility to many parts of the city. The final section of **Northern Walnut Creek Trail** will

many parts of the city. The final section of **Northern Walnut Creek Trail** will continue from the circle on the concrete path near the park entrance on Oakbrook across Walnut Creek and under (or over) the I35/Walnut Creek bridge, generally to follow the creek and join with the existing **Southern Walnut Creek Trail** at Govalle Park. This final extension awaits funding. Follow the overall project at https://tinyurl.com/WCtrailProj.

The latest estimate for the fencing to be removed is about the end of May. Completion of the section under the Lamar bridge and on the Lamar entrance to the trail west of Lamar to Walnut Creek Metropolitan Park will follow.

Highlights of 2022 Property Value Protest Workshop by Jill Leberknight

For those that missed the property value protest workshop on April 27th, I've assembled top tips, reminders, and guidance for approaching the TCAD 2022 Property appraisal protest process. There is a wide breadth of information to share that I plan to discuss in longer video format so stay tuned to neighborhood social media outlets for more news and updates.

Important Dates:

April 18th, 2022 Informal process began

 $\begin{array}{c} \text{May 16th or 30 days after receipt of notice} \\ \text{Deadline to file protest} \end{array}$

June 30th
Last day of the Informal Process

June 21st ARB Hearings begin

Don't miss tax exemptions for your homestead!

<u>New Homestead</u> law effective 1 January allows homebuyers to file for homestead exemption in the year of purchase, provided it is their primary residence.

Also, Austin has increased the homestead exemption on the city portion of property taxes to 20% from 10%.

AGENT JILL STRATEGIES TO PROTEST

Phase 1: FILING OPTIONS

DO NOT E-FILE unless you plan on handling the entire protest on your own.

Notes: *e-file* is not the same as *online file*! Also, you have only one chance per property to protest, by law.

Online

According to TCAD, "by filing online, you will receive an immediate confirmation that your protest has been filed. Additionally, you will be able to upload comments and evidence related to your protest, review evidence from the appraisal district, and accept/decline any settlement offer through your online account."

Set up your account by using the property owner ID and pin number on your Notice of Appraised Value. If you do not have a property owner ID or pin number, contact the TCAD Customer Service Department for assistance.

By Mail

You can send us your protest by mail at: Travis Central Appraisal District PO Box 149012, Austin TX 78714

In-Person

You can stop by TCAD's office during normal business hours: 850 East Anderson Lane Austin, TX 78752

Phase 2: EVIDENCE STRATEGIES & PREPARATION

Decide which protest argument best fits your need: Sales or Equity.

SALES ARGUMENT

- Determine the condition of your property based on CAD property conditions.
- Gather documentation that supports this position.
- Examine Improvements with a critical eye.
- Develop Information unknown to the district.
- Make sure comps are within your CAD neighborhood.
- Crime & noise influences are difficult to establish unless you can show undue & repeated threat.
- Do not rest your case on minor home repairs. CAD often classifies as normal home maintenance.
- Use your special knowledge about the detrimental aspects of your neighborhood & property.
- 10-14 days prior place open records request via fax to CAD for decisions made in your tax neighborhood.
- If you have multiple properties, request to protest them all together.

Note: Evidence packet now available online when you register

Types of Evidence to Use

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- Settlement or closing statement
- Written: market analysis
- Written: equity analysis
- Current fee appraisal
- Engineers report citing problem
- Government report
- Cost to cure estimates
- Expense opinion
- Pictures

NOTE - Realtor CMA NO LONGER RECOMMENDED

EQUITY ARGUMENT

- Equity comparables include all homes in your neighborhood regardless if they sold or not. These can be found on the TCAD website under the advanced property search drop down menu.
- Equity comparables can be any home within your neighborhood code goal to identify 5-7 properties
- Analize TCAD evidence materials to identify values of surrounding neighbors properties.
- Determine if there are inequities in value that support a lower value.
- Be mindful of selecting similar condition properties and lots.
- Community collaboration. Jill will post a shareable Google Spreadsheet for neighbors to use on social media.
- Greater availability of online resources

Recommended Tax Professionals to Aid in Filing a Protest

Home Tax Shield - http://www.hometaxshield.com/partners/ This company uses advanced AI software technology

Texas Protax - <u>www.texasprotax.com</u>

Five Stone Tax Advisors - <u>www.fivestonetax.com</u>

Texas tax Protest - www.texastaxprotest.com

Discount Property Taxes - www.discountpropertytaxes.com

Agent Jill's Annual Big Picture Overview of Previous Years Condition Values.

This table below showing sold statistics in the WCN area should give you data points to do preliminary research on whether the "sold argument" approach might be your best direction for a protest this year.

Walnut Creek North Austin Home Values for 2021 Tax Appraisal Year									
Category	# of Properties	AVG \$	Highest \$	Lowest \$	AVG \$ Sq Ft	High \$ Sq Ft	Low \$ Sq Ft	AVG Year Buil	tAVG Days on Market
Poor	3	\$432,000	\$475,000	\$405,000	\$284.40	\$395.44	\$208.70	1966	14
Fair	4	\$389,688	\$429,750	\$349,000	\$212.97	\$231.01	\$196.86	1966	13
Average	6	\$485,525	\$640,000	\$381,500	\$229.89	\$272.47	\$176.60	1965	44
Good	11	\$539,866	\$825,000	\$372,030	\$284.01	\$357.77	\$159.30	1965	31
Excellent	3	\$681,333	\$839,000	\$570,000	\$350.07	\$356.94	\$344.41	1960	18
Flip	1	\$680,000	\$680,000	\$680,000	\$416.67	\$416.67	\$416.67	1969	27
	28	\$515,373	\$839,000	\$349,000	\$274.12	\$416.67	\$159.30	1965	28

by Jennifer L. Bristol

Why Aren't There Birds at My Birdfeeder?

I have had a lot of questions about why birds aren't coming to feeders this Spring. The simple answer is — it's Spring. As insects emerge our resident birds begin feeding on the bugs as they prepare to breed and raise their chicks. Some species, such as Blue Jays and White-winged Doves, might still mix their protein-rich insect diet with seeds, but for the most part they will happily eat the bugs we find annoying. As for the songbirds on the Spring migrations: they pretty much only dine on insects as the protein fuels their long distant flights. In short, it is okay to take down your feeders during the spring and put them back out in August when the breeding season is over and the insect population is not as robust.

The same is true for hummingbirds. Black-chinned and Ruby-throated pass through our area to points north. Some Ruby-throats will nest in the area and people are generally surprised to learn that they eat millions of tiny insects every spring. If you want to put out a hummingbird feeder the best time to do so is mid to late summer. What's even better is to plant native plants that bloom from April to September. If you do put out a feeder please do not use the premixed stuff with red dye in it. Be sure to replace the sugar water frequently. Fermenting liquid can cause a hummingbird's long tongue to swell and prevent them from being able to eat.

The best thing to put out this time of year and all summer is water. A shallow bird bath is a wonderful way to bring in the birds and offer them something they really need. Just make sure you keep the water and bath clean, and out of reach of predators including dogs and cats.

Some folks have inquired how winter storm Uri impacted the birds. Biologist are still studying the long-term impact; however, it is safe to say several species were hit hard. Prior to the storm large flocks of Cedar Waxwings were moving about the state and in our neighborwood. They were fueling and flocking up in preparation for their migration to their breeding habitat in the boreal forests of Canada. The winter storm froze the berries and insects they depended on for food. During the summer, forest fires and drought also took a toll. I've only had one flock of six birds in my yard this year. It will take time for their numbers to recover. You can help them by removing invasive plants from your yard and planting only native shrubs and trees that produce berries in the fall and spring for them to enjoy: https://www.audubon.org/native-plants

The live oak, little walnut and native pecan trees are like an HEB for many species of birds. It's not the acorns or pecans they eat, but rather the myriad of insects they house throughout the year. Keeping your live oaks healthy is important. Oak wilt (https://texasoakwilt.org) is a devastating disease that can kill the trees so please be sure to only trim the oaks in the dead of summer or after the first hard freeze in winter.



Cedar Waxwings Devouring Holly Berries Before "Big Freeze" Storm Uri in February 2021 Picture by Jen Bristol

If you are interested in learning more about birds in Central Texas, I highly recommend joining Travis Audubon to take advantage of the many bird walks and speakers series they offer. If you are looking for cool places to go birding in Texas in any season, check out *Parking Lot Birding: A Fun Guide to Discovering Birds in Texas* at https://www.bookpeople.com.

On June 18th: The North ATX Good Neighbor Fest!

Developed primarily by WCN residents, this free early Summer Festival gives all of us an opportunity to get out—with the kids if you got'em—and join with neighbors from the area in fellowship and fun! Let's shake off some of the pandemic stress and create some healing vibes with old and new friends through interactive experiences, food, art, live music, and family-friendly activities:

https://tinyurl.com/natxfest

St.Mark United Methodist Church Wildflower Meadow; 601 Braker Lane (just west of Lamar)

Elections: We had'em

Everything passed. So in the City you can safely use marijuana (small quantity) but you don't need to even if you've worried about "No-Knock" Warrants, as they're now illegal.

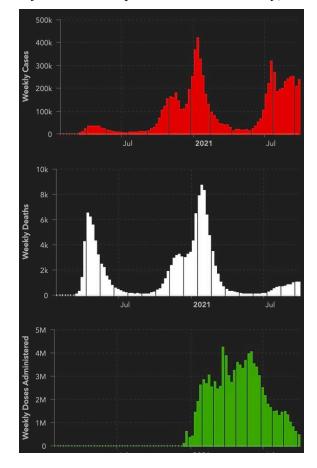
Meanwhile, in Texas the "old folks" (over 65) and disabled now have their school tax exemption made consistent with the general one. And the general one was increased from \$25,000 to \$40,000. Since this tax is the primary soure of money for Texas schools, they will take a hit after the first year, which will be paid from a budget surplus. YipeeKiYay!

The Global Pandemic: It Ain't Over, Not Even Close

On May 4th, estimates indicate that U.S. deaths from Covid were about to pass 1,000,000; a staggering statistic (NBC pointed out that this is about the population of "Silicon Valley" (San Jose, CA)). But the US seems to be out of its pandemic phase for the moment. The numbers show we are near a low point for new cases, hospitalizations and deaths. It is believed that the reasons for this are that most of the US population either is vaccinated or has been infected with one of the forms of Covid. Thus we are at a "natural" low point and risks are correspondingly low. This doesn't mean we can stop avoiding the coronavirus! It's clearly still in our environment and still in pandemic stages in places around the world. But it does mean we can (probably) safely ease up on some of our defensive behaviors, like wearing a mask in most environments. (And remember: the highest risk factor for death or serious illness from Covid is age.) There are several variants still circulating and a new one on the horizon, but our vaccinations are still effective against serious illness or death. A recent infection is protective for a period which is not very well pinned-down at the moment, and many, if not most, recent infections are unknown to authorities because they aren't reported unless they are serious; it's likely most tests are done at home using the kits provided by the government. This has put a big hole in our understanding of the dynamics of the pandemic in this country,

but doesn't negate the overall situation showing us at a low point in all categories.

The effectiveness of this combination of vaccines and natural immunity from infections is best shown in recent data from the U.K. shown by Johns Hopkins (plots from the U.S. are similar but not as dramatic because our unvaccinated population percentage is so much larger). The data at right compare weekly cases of infection (top, red) and death (middle, white) along with administered vaccine doses (bottom, green). Note how deaths track infections until significant vaccinations (bottom) start in 2021, so that this last big winter surge of cases has produced a much smaller increase in deaths. The effectiveness of UK's interventions in the pandemic could hardly be more stark: You would have to be religiously converted to some of the misinformation circulating in the social media world not to be convinced that vaccinations work. Undoubtedly this is why we and the UK currently are at a lull in cases, hospitalizations and deaths from Covid. And a new variant would have to be both more infectious and more deadly to have much effect, at least until our "immunity" starts to wane. It appears from relevant data that most of our vaccines provide longer immunity than is obtained from natural infection, perhaps because the intensity of infection varies so widely for the latter. A combination of the two seems to provide even more enduring protection, so vaccines are being recommended even with natural immunity. Also note that even folks who are immunocompromised or have multiple comorbidities gain levels of immunity from the U.S. vaccines, so vaccines supplement their other safety measures.



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Bottom line: Get your vaccinations and boosters!

It's Time to Switch: The Neighborhood Website Rocks!

If you haven't visited the WCNA website - https://wcnanews.com/ - recently please check it out. Still a bit of a work in progress, but the primary functions have been implemented, perhaps with some bells and whistles to come. The site is now our primary focal point for communication between neighbors and between the neighborhood association and residents, with a calendar of planned events (including a link to suggest more) and email interface for communication with the Board of Directors and site manager. You will find posts of many past events, including videos of all the "Biscuits and Coffey" segments (with Jill Leberknight of Biscuit Brothers fame and Beth Coffey) and guests, as well as news of ongoing activities in the neighborhood. The site is primarily meant for activity within the boundary of the Walnut Creek Neighborhood or adjacent thereto, which makes it much easier to navigate than the social media sites. Of course links to those sites are included, as well as to the PayPal site to join/pay dues and/or donate to any of the WCNA-sponsored projects. In other words, the site is (very nearly) the only place you need to keep up with all things WCN.

Note the archive of past newsletters is not yet fully populated, but soon you will be able to download and read any newsletter published in at least the last 12 years.

Traffic Monitors Are Watching Us! (Maybe they'll help.)

You surely noticed the solar-powered speed monitors which were set up on both sides of Covington and Whitewing for a while (the one on Covington has now been removed), since they display your measured speed on big screens mounted on metal posts as you approach them, one on either side of both streets. These units were requested either by or as a result of comments from residents of the neighborhood (took a year of repeated requests to get the ones on Whitewing). These systems are for data collection only, though they take pictures and record the speed of oncoming cars. The information is for use by city traffic engineers only, to determine whether and what factors are needed and can be employed on our streets to help keep the community safe.

You may not see your speed displayed in a particular time period, as the normal procedure with these is to collect "background" behavior for a period before turning the display on. Thus the effect of having your speed shown to you can be determined, and potentially the effect of changing the speed limit. Many factors go into deciding when a speed limit change is needed, including – in a residential area – how wide the streets are and whether there are sidewalks. From discussions with one of the engineers involved with the measurement projects, it is likely that a lower speed limit will be recommended for much or most of our neighborhood.



Speed monitors on Whitewing



QR Code to pay dues or donate

Join and/or support WCNA: You can usePayPal for both dues & contributions.

<u>PayPal</u> is a popular way to become – or remain - a member, or to make a donation toward WCNA projects (shown on drop-down menus on the Donate site). You can use any credit card to make a payment via PayPal through the "join/donate" page on the WCNA website, http://wcnanews.com/.

Alternatively, with your smart phone using a QR code reader you can go to the same page using the QR code at left.

Note: You don't have to join PayPal to use it for payments.

Austin City Council

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

<u>City</u>: All services, codes & code violations, animal reports:

<u>Call 311</u>

[Get the phone app: Austin311 on Google Play and iTunes]

APD District Rep: **Adam Soliz** 512 974-8143

Adam.soliz@austintexas.gov

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

APD Animal Cruelty Unit Tip Hot Line: 512 978-0523

> Emery Sadkin CoA Animal Protection Officer, Wildlife Call 311 or 512-974-2000

Local Weather Station on Oakwood:

https://tinyurl.com/OakwoodWeather

Office of Police Oversight policeoversight@austintexas.gov

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The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the Robert Frost



It's hard to believe that one megalomaniac can cause the death, destruction and massive waste of money that we're observing daily. It requires control of the thought processes of millions of people and control of the actions of a great many people who have some power in their own right. Which is harder to believe: that there is such a person or that there are so many of "the rest"?

OPTIMIST:

Someone who figures out that taking a step backward after taking a step forward is not a disaster, it's a cha-cha.







Left: Demo begins on the burned house on Cedarbrook Ct

Finally: Rain after several dry months produces rainflowers on Hornsby (above) and Scurry.



We won! Austin prevailed in the law suit brought by big sign companies to abolish our law restricting new advertising billboards to "on-premise" only. The city has been enforcing this rule for years, provoking continuous law suits from big billboard companies based on their free-speech rights. The issue finally was decided in the U.S. Supreme Court in late April, with Austin – and all cities – affirmed the right to restrict outdoor advertising to on-premises only, meaning the sign must be on the property of the business advertised. Non-profits interested in beautification and safety experts worried about distraction caused by rapidly-changing digital signs supported Austin in the case. Existing billboards can remain but can't be changed to digital.

Don't Miss the North ATX Good Neighbor Fest: Sat, June 18th

PRSRT STD. US POSTAGE PAID. AUSTIN, TX. 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.

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

21	University of Texas at Austin Commencement- https://commencement.utexas.edu/				
25	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.				
26	Kerrville Folk Festival begins - https://www.kerrvillefolkfestival.org/				
27	Last Day of Classes, AISD				
28-30	Texas Tax-free Appliance Weekend https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/publications/96-1331.php				
30	Memorial Day Observed- Banks & Post Office closed				
4-5	Austin Pond Tour- https://austinpondsociety.org/page-18185				
8	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.				
9-12	Republic of Texas Motorcycle Rally https://www.republicoftexasmotorcyclerally.com/				
12	Kerrville Folk Festival ends				
18	North ATX Good Neighbor Fest https://www.cutthevs.com/gnf-about				
19	Father's Day				
19	Juneteenth				
21	First Day of Summer				
22	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.				
23-26	Watermelon Thump - http://newsite.watermelonthump.com/				
4	Independence Day				
4	Walnut Creek Neighborhood Parade & Picnic - info on social media				
4	Willie Nelson's 4 th of July Picnic: Q2 Stadium, noon. https://tinyurl.com/Q2-Willie				
6	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.				
7	Zilker Summer Musical begins - https://zilker.org/summer-2022/				
	25 26 27 28-30 30 4-5 8 9-12 12 18 19 21 22 23-26 4 4 6				