



Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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July
Aug
2022

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It Was the Biggest One Yet: The Tenth Fourth!

Roughly 130 folks showed up! And that ain't all: Six – count'em, six – bagpipers & drummers from the *Capitol City Highlanders* led the parade, including (for the fifth time) our resident piper Philip Bates. How's that for a great 'hood event?!

As advertised for the last couple of months here and on social media and by fliers hung on door handles by volunteers (thanks, Adrian and all!), the **Tenth Annual WCNA Parade and Potluck Picnic** was hosted by Joel and Kay Klumpp in their driveway and



Finally Caught'em!
Kay & Joel: Superhosts!

front yard – and spilling out onto the street – at 11813 Indianhead. They live at the middle of their stretch of the route designated as “The Peninsula”, the center of the parade route formed by the intersections of Indianhead, Caddo and Oakwood (thanks



Resident Piper Philip and Kay (left)
and five more Capitol City Highlanders.
(Photo by Nishi Whiteley)

to our curvy and non-parallel streets. They began the tradition in 2012 when, about a week before the day, they extended an invitation to their nearby neighbors – especially those with kids - to join with them in an “all-welcome parade” around their block (the Peninsula) mid-morning of the 4th, followed by a potluck picnic: “Bring your blankets or lawn chairs and favorite dishes and join with us and neighbors on our shady front yard” in a community-building celebration. The word got out and people from all over WCN showed up. Thus an instant tradition was established. Joel's parents were visiting and co-hosting, his dad cooking the hotdogs and mother helping set up and serve the crowd. Thus has it continued till the present, with nextdoor neighbors Adrienne Arter and Les Griffin contributing in major ways, along with the kids as they grew (and continue to grow) up. The Klumpps represent the embodiment of ideal residents, neighbors and citizens!

Were you surprised that it was hot on the 4th? It's generally a perfect day to plan for on outdoor activity in Austin, as it never rains (oh wait: I forgot last year) on Independence

Day (but that rain last year waited until most activities were over). The 101-degree(F) high was the 26th over 100 degrees up till the parade/picnic this year, which is looking increasingly like the devastating drought year of 2011.

The number of (us) old-timers at the fete has slowly been declining over the years, which means “new-timers” have more than taken up the slack. Lots of new faces, even more from the last few years and a sprinkling of “veterans” made up the crowd, with the largest number of young – some very young – ever! The route isn't really long, but it's deceptive: several marchers carried their kiddos all or part of the way. The band set a pretty brisk pace, stretching us out over the whole Caddo leg, but they would pause and march in place periodically to help to regroup. As traditionalized by Juan and Carmen Ramirez at the corner of Oakwood and Indianhead – the lowest elevation point of the route – kids in the parade encountered older youths tossing candy into the street around them (Parade pause again...). Eventually everyone got back up the hill to the Klumpps', and after a brief respite, the picnic began, with the usual amazing array of dishes (and (probably) a record number of sweet choices).

There was plenty of time to make Willie's picnic afterward, but hard to imagine many braving that blazing sun in the middle of Q2 stadium. (From reports apparently the relatively small number of early patrons situated themselves in the shady seats regardless of what their tickets said.)

We all enjoyed ourselves immensely, especially being able to be together and talk (relatively) safely in person despite the continuing pandemic. First time in a while for many of us!



Kiddo tries to catch Superbubbler
Ellen's super bubble!



The concrete ditch is perfect for Adah Scout to create her chalk masterpieces (NW)

Lots of kids, from infants to teenagers, adding enormous energy to the proceedings. Several folks, including a kid or two, proved to be very proficient at producing the giant bubbles so engaging to kids – of all ages. The concrete ditch running beside the street proved again to be another strong draw for kids to produce chalk drawings, and a Cornhole game attracted a mix of kids and adults. The street proved to be as big a draw as anything, with even one of our Safety Team captains setting up there (did I say Safety?). Narrow Indianhead was lined with more cars than usual on one side and/or the other for a considerable distance in either direction, and of course the streets are our sidewalks for most of the neighborhood so there were folks there all the time, coalescing into a smaller space

when an occasional vehicle needed to pass through.

The Klumpps intend to do it again next year, again with help from volunteer neighbors and the neighborhood association. So watch for notices in the newsletter, on social media and perhaps at your door. Or maybe you can remember the date...?



Safety Team leader Siobhan with Reagan: You sure this is safe?

Report From “Our Trail”: Some confusion about the orange “fence” being down for awhile early in July turned out to be just a “mental moment” by the Foreman for the project, and it was put back up. He reported via Gary “Kubota Kid” Brewer that they would be working on the landscaping – soil and seed alongside the concrete – for a while, perhaps until the end of the month before it could be opened for public use. Work continues on the two bridges that will get us under the Lamar bridge, and the entrance off Lamar, but we should be able to use “our” concrete section by around the end of July. Full trail use under Lamar and to Walnut Creek Metropolitan Park was originally estimated to happen by the end of 2022.



Yikes! Staff Shortages are Creating Serious Problems and Risks

Staff shortages have been reported in several public institutions, most of which are “critical infrastructure”. For example, the “Criminal Justice System” has chronically been understaffed, especially at the guard level, for many years, with obvious safety and welfare risks. A similar shortage has been reported in Texas’ juvenile detention system, where the Texas Tribune recently reported that no more kids will be accepted as of July 2022 because of a shortage of more than 330 corrections officers out of a required number of about 700 (AAS, 9 July 2022).

Just as alarming: we have a similarly risky situation in the shortage of staff to take 911 calls in Austin. If you've dialed the emergency number recently there's a good chance you may have had to wait, despite the professionalism of the call takers here. Clearly this is a problem, as time can be so critical when a 911 call is made. As in the situations above, the problem is staff, rather than the usual lack of money. But the two are obviously related through salary levels. An assistant manager at the Austin call center told Austin city councilmembers that there is a shortage of 44 call takers for 911 and 22 police dispatchers, about 40% below funded positions. Resulting delays have ranged up to a couple of minutes, which seem like an eternity in many situations.

This staffing problem is now like the coronavirus: endemic. The losses in the call and dispatch centers accelerated during the pandemic, as it did for most other government departments. So the Council is addressing the overall issue, with emergency operations staff the highest priorities. Austin's wages for these positions are lower than for surrounding cities, and the Council intends to raise emergency staff wages to match the top 25% in the country.

Good News: The national emergency number 988 has been activated widely in the country. This number complements – but does not replace – the *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* number 1-800-273-8255. It contacts a mental health consultant without having to remember that number, and provides similar help to persons in personal distress. Staffing this service is facing the same issues discussed above.

Tweets by funny people, published by Reader's Digest:

"? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? ! ? !" - Dogs on the 4th of July.

What idiot called it the sun instead of a space heater?

Every time I almost think humanity will be okay, I see someone struggle with the self-checkout for 20 minutes.

Natural Gas: Some Good, Some Very Bad

If you've driven Texas highways at night in oil-producing areas (i.e., nearly anywhere) it's likely you've seen "flares" from oil towers. These are flames from burning "excess" natural gas associated with the production of oil, which is much more dense and easy to store per unit of energy contained. The (heavy) liquid petroleum is readily stored in giant containers – usually cylindrical – in quantities representing huge amounts of energy. The natural gas, composed mostly of methane, is much less dense and requires a much larger container to hold the same potential energy as oil, making it much less valuable. Containing it in liquid form (LNG) to provide comparable energy density is expensive and not practical as a local practice, so this "excess" energy, which also is toxic to animals and subject to explosion, is burned – flared – to eliminate this direct risk. When the world is desperately looking for energy sources this practice seems extremely profligate, and Texas has one of the three "dirtiest" producing fields in the world (Russia and Turkmenistan have the others).



Flaring Oil/Gas Well and Pumpjack

On the other hand, use of natural gas requires very little processing compared to oil prior to use.

On the other, other hand, natural gas – basically methane – is a very potent greenhouse gas, at least 30 to 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide, depending on "details". So handling it so as to prevent leaking into the atmosphere is critical – and difficult. It has been estimated (based on field measurements) that the valves and piping used to move the gas to processing and storage centers and to distribute it to homes is leaking (cumulatively) huge amounts of methane.

Researchers have estimated that "fixing the plumbing" is a straightforward task and would go a long way toward reducing the rise in global temperature.

On the good news side, a couple of approaches may help mitigate the problem and possibly provide a dramatic reduction in the use of natural gas to meet world energy needs:

1) Researchers at the University of Illinois Chicago have discovered a way to convert the methane in natural gas into liquid methanol at room temperature. This discovery, reported in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, could potentially provide a cleaner energy source for many of our everyday activities.

When burned, natural gas -- the fuel used to heat homes, cook food and generate electricity -- produces carbon dioxide, a powerful greenhouse gas. "Researchers have been interested in ways to convert methane to methanol at ambient temperatures to sidestep all the heat and pressure that is currently required in industrial processes to perform this conversion," said Meenesh Singh, assistant professor of chemical engineering at the UIC College of Engineering and corresponding author of the paper.

Methanol would be a better "bridging fuel", driving a "methanol economy" where it replaces current fossil fuels in transportation, energy storage and as the dominant precursor material for synthetic chemicals and other products. Methanol is currently used in fuel cell technology that powers some city buses and other vehicles. Its lower emission potentials and higher volumetric energy density make it an attractive alternative to fossil fuels, and in addition it can be stored safely in regular containers, unlike natural gas which has to be stored as liquefied natural gas (LNG) under pressure and is much more expensive.

2) And some Aggies have found a local use for flare gas: powering Crypto-mining. Their company, Giga, places a shipping container full of thousands of bitcoin miners on an oil well, diverts the natural gas into generators, which convert the gas into electricity that is then used to power the miners. The process reduces CO2-equivalent emissions by about 63% compared to continued flaring, according to research from Denver-based Crusoe Energy Systems.

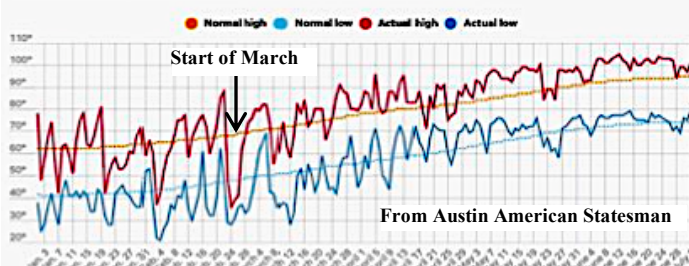
**The National
Weather Service
has just published
instructions on
how to bake a
lasagna in your
mailbox**

Yeah, it's hot! If you don't believe it compare the crooked red line on the top plot to the right with the smooth line that runs through it – the normal high temperature in Austin - until you get toward the end of February. Our high has only dropped below the

normal value a handful of times since then. And we had the hottest May and June on record!

2022 temperatures in Austin since January

Since the end of March, daily maximum temperatures have been hotter than normal nearly every day. June saw highs of 100 degrees or more on 21 out of 30 days. All figures are from Austin's main weather station at Camp Mabey.



Finally, Can We Compare Treatment Costs Before Making Healthcare Choices?

You know how when a mechanic has just come out after checking your car and tells you your struts are stuck and your frambulator is fried and it's gonna cost you 1.5 million dollars? Similar to getting a hospital bill, eh? That is, most of us have no idea whether what we're being told has any credibility or not. Some legislators didn't like the Affordable Care Act's cost to government, with the result that two acts were passed whose intent was to generate competitiveness between various care providers, first hospitals and then insurance companies. The theory is that this would result in lower costs from both. Thus: two acts in a couple of years, the first toward hospitals, the second toward insurance companies. It may be too simple a way to consider an extremely complex structure.



The hospital “Pricing Transparency Act” became effective in January of 2021

This allows us to get lists of the costs of procedures, treatments and supporting materials from every hospital (see <https://www.cms.gov/hospital-price-transparency>). (Every hospital that complies, that is. Many of the larger hospitals apparently are ignoring the law and just paying the – to them – nominal penalty. The concept was that this would allow cost comparison between hospitals prior to choosing one for scheduled care (if, or as if, you are paying for the service yourself. Accordingly, you can go to most hospitals' websites and, with sufficient digging, download a list of most or all of the procedures and materials performed / used there. As predicted, this may have had less than no effect, because the prices hospitals show there have almost nothing to do with the prices they actually charge. If you download one of these you'll have a similar reaction to looking at one of those receipts you get at CVS, but prices are 100 times bigger. So there's that...

Meanwhile we learned a little about how actual patient costs are generated, and it's way too complicated to be explained – period. It is set up to involve insurance of some kind, therefore negotiations between hospitals, middlemen, businesses and insurance companies, with the negotiated prices greatly affected by the relative leverages among the participants. For example, the more clients an insurance company represents the better the chance it can negotiate a lower price for a procedure than a competitor, and it doesn't have to pass any reduction on to patients (in fact, a middleman may get a bigger chunk than anybody else). And remember, the government is in the middle of the system with rules and regulations developed while the unholy system was developing. The whole system is so complicated that it can't be “operated” by a single person or organization. It's obvious this system doesn't pay significant attention to an individual patient.

All this impedes the approach favored by conservatives who believe that competition is the only appropriate way to reduce costs in the U.S. healthcare “system”, which is about twice as expensive as any advanced country, and with typically worse outcomes (For example, see <https://tinyurl.com/hlthcostcomp>).

Additional requirements will be added by the government on 1 Jan 2023 and 1 Jan 2024, ostensibly to cover more items and perhaps make the process “easier”. You can explore further at <https://tinyurl.com/InsPriceComps> (try to stay calm...!).

Generally, most healthcare received by us is paid for through insurance.

So the appropriate information we need to make an intelligent choice about our healthcare is between insurance companies for the same “service”. The Affordable Care Act was instrumental in enabling this capability, as it defined coverage levels (plans) and the maximum costs insurance companies could charge for each level under the program (with subsidies for individuals dependent on their incomes in an attempt to reduce the disparity in personal costs across the population). And many, if not most, insurance companies have joined the program, which requires them to clearly identify how much they will charge for each level of coverage specified by the government.

Thus the Healthcare Price Transparency Act that became effective on **1 July 2022** requires each insurance company to list charges for about 500 “shoppable” services to potential clients (insurers must post the amounts paid for “every physician in network, every hospital, every surgery center, every nursing facility,” said [Jeffrey Leibach](#), a partner at the consulting firm [Guidehouse](#)). Of course, your particular cost will depend on the plan you sign up / pay for, so you need the lists from each insurance company you're considering before making that decision. And it's also likely that the company showing a lower price for one procedure may be the highest for another, forcing priority ranking and/or weighting in the process of choosing. This sounds worse than doing taxes...

So: Most of us likely will just choose between the two or three plans offered by our employers

But the Good News is that, as of 1 January 2022 we consumers (at least insured ones) have much improved billing protection from exorbitant bills for emergency services, when we may have to go to “out-of-network” providers because no in-network provider is available. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 enacted on December 27, 2020 contains provisions to help protect consumers against “surprise bills” resulting from the ambiguity in the “in” vs “out” of network definitions. Too complicated to catch every situation, but a lot better than nothing.

Have you heard about HEB adding 27,000 feet to the IH35/Parmer store? \$18M & about 2 years.

The Parmer/IH35 Diverging Diamond Intersection: Officially Opened on June 22nd

You may have thought that this amazing – and at first confusing – intersection opened back in 2021, and it did become “driveable” then. I was worried then about the difficult-to-see lane and stop markings, especially the stop lines because they were so hard to see and because they are staggered at the stop lights to account for the angle the



Diverging Diamond Intersection at IH 35 and Parmer Lane

crossing lanes make with each other. But the official ribbon-cutting was held on 22 June, and by this time all lanes were resurfaced and lines were repainted, making them much easier to see (unfortunately they're already starting to fade from all use and “dirt”). As you can see in the picture, where the Eastbound and Westbound sets of lanes cross one another at an oblique angle on either side of IH35. The “stop lines” - marking where to stop when the lights are red - are staggered to allow as much forward progress as possible.

Thus the cars in adjacent lanes are lined up unevenly, which is an “unnatural” situation. The lines in your lane tell you where to stop, and if you go past your line only a short distance the front of your car will be in the closest lane coming from the opposite direction. I've seen a wreck caused by this staggered lineup (approaching cars may be out of sight at the time you stop).

This configuration allows the intersection to be controlled by only four sets of lights: The three at the crossing lanes on each side of IH35 allow traffic to flow either east or west, and the flow allows left turns with no stopping. You'll probably be able to tell how much faster the traffic can travel through, and the average time to get through the intersection has decreased significantly. The other control lights control IH35 access road traffic making a left turn onto the Parmer lanes or making a U-turn back onto IH35.

The most aggravating change is caused by not being able to go through the intersection on the IH35 access lanes. These lanes ONLY turn left onto Parmer, so if you've made the wrong assumption you'll find yourself either on Parmer going away from where you want to be or making a U-turn and back onto the access road in the opposite direction. To go straight through the intersection on the access road requires staying in the Parmer bypass lane and going under the Parmer bridge, then merging onto the regular access lanes on the other side.

Covid-19! OK, (almost) enough said about that! But wait: cases are increasing again! But not nearly as fast as previous surges. But still: Going Up! Correct. And we still need to be careful, especially because almost all new cases are caused by variants of the Omicron Variant, which caused the really bad surge in the winter. Yeah, but we have enough people vaccinated - and the vaccines still provide pretty good protection - that we aren't likely to see a “big surge”. But more people need to get vaccinated, and some – if not most – of us still need to take precautions, like wearing a mask in crowded, closed spaces. ***Cases are going back up again!***

Meanwhile: Monkeypox! Oh, yeah, we have an unknown number of cases with infection increasing at an unknown rate, and it threatens to become an endemic problem like Covid-19 is becoming, or like flu. Although the government was way ahead in preparations for Monkeypox, it hasn't acted quickly since it's current appearance to increase testing ability or distribute the stockpiled vaccine. Or to increase production to counter what could become as widely spread as the flu. The saving grace: even bad cases aren't likely to be deadly, and spread is primarily via close personal contact. The highest risk population appears to be gay men, which means rapid spread among most of the population is unlikely. And the government is increasing test and vaccine manufacture and distribution at an increasing rate, with the estimate that we should be in a good posture by the end of July.

Austin is in Stage 1 Drought Water Use Restrictions.**Austin Water Rules for Residential Users:**

- **Hose-end Sprinklers** - two days per week - midnight to 10 a.m. and/or 7 p.m. to midnight
 - Even address - Thursday, Sunday
 - Odd address - Wednesday, Saturday
- **Automatic Irrigation** - one day per week - midnight to 8 a.m. and/or 7 p.m. to midnight (*Residential customers may also water a second day with a hose-end sprinkler*)
 - Even address - Thursday
 - Odd address - Wednesday

Failing to follow the water restrictions may result in enforcement action, including **finest** of up to \$500 per violation. To report violations, call 3-1-1, use the **3-1-1 mobile app**, or **submit a report online**. Please provide the address, time, date, and type of violation.



Check out your website: <http://www.wcnanews.com>! You'll be happy you did. You can see upcoming events, watch "Biscuits & Coffee", see newsletters and articles, etc, etc, etc!



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

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

City: All services, codes & code violations, animal reports:

Call 311

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

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512 974-8143

Adam.soliz@austintexas.gov

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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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Some of the Kids at the 2022 Fourth of July Parade and Potluck Picnic



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

July	14	Zilker Summer Musical continues - https://zilker.org
	20	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	23	Lady Bird Day - https://www.wildflower.org/event/lbd
August	3	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	5-7	Texas Tax-Free Weekend: https://comptroller.texas.gov/taxes/publications/98-490/
	13	Zilker Summer Musical ends
	15	AISD First Day of School
	17	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	22	UT classes begin
	27	Bat Fest - https://www.austintexas.org/event/austin-bat-fest/367810/
	31	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
September	5	Labor Day - Banks and Post Office closed
	5	***Large Brush Collection begins until all is picked up***
	5	Free Day of Yoga - https://www.freedayofyoga.com
	14	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	16	Diez y Seis