



Walnut Creek Neighborhood News

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association

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

Nov
Dec
2023

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Social Media/Listservs:

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

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

Website: www.WCNAnews.com

Brrr! Who Left the Door Open? But The Chilliness Didn't Deter Our Ghouls and Spooks!

Walnut EEK! Fills the Neighborhood Again

The intrepid Walnut EEK! team (Melissa Huber, Cynthia Ann Gesotti and Max Meehan) pulled off another amazing Halloween extravaganza! Folks signed up on their WalnutEEK.com site to put their homes on the neighborhood map, indicating decorating their property, providing treats, or both. As in previous years, printed versions of the map were handed out at three locations around the neighborhood, allowing Trick-or-Treaters to optimize their hauls! Neighbors who decorated their homes were automatically entered in a drawing to receive gift cards from participating businesses in the area (see the winning homes and businesses below).

The results were so much fun! A spider dropped down from a tree onto the Spooky Hayride bunch, "Interactive Central" on Hilltop (the Leberknights' driveway and Max's whole front yard) were always filled with neighborhood adults and kids and visitors from outside the 'hood.

Jill and Damon had disembodied character Sheldon on a screen that interacted intelligently with anyone around.



Jill, Seth, and Sullivan's Creep Show

Cynthia let passersby help cover her roses with "blood" at the "Spooky Stop" (place to get maps) on Presa, and provided a fire for those who got chilled in the cool evening. She also posted the "Ghost Slow" signs around the 'hood reminding drivers of kids on the streets.

Max built a Haunted House for this year's EEK!



Max's Haunted House & Jail

One of the best presentations from the event is a video produced by Jess Decelle and posted on the WCN Facebook Group site (<http://goo.gl/4G41rS>). If you belong to the group, search with the icon below the green "+Invite" button to find her name and scroll to the video, or try <http://bit.ly/Walnut-EEK-2023>. Be sure to turn the sound on; It's a terrific show! The organizers thank all the folks who helped put the whole thing



Cynthia's "Bloody" Roses

together, the neighbors who signed up and decorated and gave out treats to make it special and safe for all the kids, the "gift" merchants, and you!

We'll do it all again next year: See you there!



EEK! Spook Hayride!



One of Cynthia's Traffic Signs

Walnut EEK! Gift Card Winners

11302 Indianhead Dr	Santorini's - \$20
102 W Covington Dr	H-E-B - \$10
11807 Whitewing Ave	Lowe's - \$15
11924 Oakbrook Dr	Blue Starlite Drive-In
11900 Glenda Ct	Peace Bakery - \$20
11511 Pollyanna Ave	H-E-B - \$10
11802 Hornsby St	Zaxby's - \$15
11801 Pollyanna Ave	Starbucks - \$15
11904 Indianhead Dr	Bouldin Acres - \$15
105 W Caddo St	Bouldin Acres - \$15
202 E Caddo St	Turnstile - \$20
11512 Oakwood Dr	Turnstile - \$20
11813 Tedford St	Lowe's - \$15
11902 Oakwood Dr	Starbucks - \$15
11901 Oakwood Dr	Gen Bobabee - \$10
11804 Tedford St	Krispy Kreme - \$10

"On Halloween you get to become anything that you want to be." Ava Dellaria, American Author

"Things are never quite as scary when you've got a [best friend](#)." Bill Waterson, American Cartoonist

Walnut Creek Neighborhood Night Out and Safety Training (Plus Dinner!)

This year the Walnut Creek Safety Team is sponsoring a new start for Neighborhood Night Out, distinct from the National Neighborhood Night Out (a long-standing national event), in the Lawshae Building at St. Mark UMC at 601 W Braker (turn south on Motheral, find parking beside the church or turn left at the end to the parking lot beside Lawshae). “Our” version of NNO, which will include a spaghetti dinner, is being financed and run by the Safety Team using funds generated from their activities. It will be fun as well as educational (also filling)! To facilitate food preparation, the Team is “rehabilitating” the kitchen in Lawshae to or beyond its original status.

Don't miss out! You'll have a chance to get practical safety information from qualified Austin Police professionals, Austin Fire Department and EMS staff. This event is an opportunity to educate neighbors on important safety principles. And - very importantly - neighbors will learn how to engage with Austin Police Department staff when an emergency crisis develops.

The program will be held on Saturday, November 11th

starting at 3:00 pm. Activities will be held in the Lawshae Building and also in the sanctuary and outside on the lawn. From 3:00 - 5:00 the Austin Police Department will present safety training and provide time for questions and answers. From 5:00 - 7:00 pm sponsors will provide a community dinner where attendees can share their insights from the informational part of the program, get to know each other and meet neighbors in an informal setting.

Emergency Medical Staff will be present with fire trucks in the parking lots for children to explore and have their questions answered. Childcare will be provided.

The goal of this event is to create a cohesive relationship between neighbors, the Austin Police Department, the Safety Team, and Emergency Medical Staff. Learn how to communicate effectively in an emergency and how to join or start communication text chains within your immediate area in our neighborhood.

This is a chance to maintain health and safety in our neighborhood as Austin continues to grow and change. Come be a part of our neighborhood team.

You say you don't have time to attend the entire program? No worries.

Feel free to attend any part that you can. It's all good!



The Elections Were Almost “Unanimous”!

The two bond elections in Austin together were the largest such in the history of Travis County, but passed easily. The total amount of money to be generated by the two is almost \$510 million, which will cost the average homeowner about \$60 per year more in property tax than presently. Despite this, both bonds garnered a large percentage of the vote. This speaks to the bread-and-butter nature of these bonds: they're predominantly for roads and parks, both of which are highly valued by “us”. While increasing the amount of real estate devoted to roads, the effect is offset somewhat by the increase in acquisition of land for green spaces; i.e., parks. With the extreme growth rate being experienced by Travis County these days these bonds seemed to be “no-brainers”.

There was considerable resistance in the Austin/Travis County area to a couple of the Texas Constitutional amendments on the ballot, but not on a statewide basis. Thirteen of the amendments passed easily, with only the proposition to raise the mandatory retirement age of state judges failing. With the language used to describe the propositions generally so obscure, the results could make one wonder if the only ones people voted against were the ones they understood (retirement age, firing the Galveston Treasurer, and exempting tax on medical equipment). It also seemed that some issues that would warrant constitutional amendment weren't on the ballot.

In Travis County there was significant pushback to allocating so much money to the fossil fuel industry to try to induce it to prevent damages like those of Winter Storm Uri, while allocating none to cleaner energy industries for the same purpose, especially since the greatest contributor was failure of gas suppliers. Given Texas leading position in renewable energy generation this seems to be a signal where we may be heading in the future.

New “Smart” Water Meters Are Being Installed Now

No doubt you have already received the large, folding notice from ATX Water about the new meters, and most homes and businesses in the area already have them installed. A map showing status of installations everywhere in the city can be seen at <https://tinyurl.com/SmrtWtr>, where you also can sign up for the new customer portal. This interface is pretty easy to navigate; i.e., well-designed and intuitive.

There are at least two reasons that this is – or at least could be if the technology is reliable – a great upgrade for homeowners: We will be able to check our instantaneous usage anytime, and we will be able to define usage levels beyond which alerts will be sent via text, email and/or phone. Installation is quick, following this procedure: As stated in the notice, an installer will show up at your meter, prepare the site if not suitable at the time, then cut off your water on the city side of your old meter, remove the old structure and meter and replace it with the new one, amazingly typically within a half-hour. The installer will then knock on your door to let you know you have the new setup, leaving a door hangar to let you know even if you're gone. The hangar instructs you to open an outside faucet (preferably the one closest to the meter but any one is OK) and run the water for about 10 minutes to allow any detritus (which might have been picked up while the end of the pipe was open) to run out of the pipe. About any faucet will do the same thing, just takes less time to clear the pipe the closer the faucet is to the break. Then you're ready to go, and you're (supposed to be) hooked up to the city via radio transmission from the new meter to a local antenna, which transmits data in real time from the meter to Austin ATX. This allows the capability mentioned above. *Maybe we can all avoid getting those \$10,000 water bills!*

Eclipses: One Gone, a Better One Coming

On October 14th, clear skies provided us (i.e., Austin) a great opportunity to observe a partial solar eclipse from our homes. To see how close we came to being able to see the “ring-of-fire” view, where the center of the moon matched the center of the sun from the viewing location, check out <https://www.space.com/where-to-stand-texas-to-see-two-solar-eclipses-under-six-months#section-the-texan-two-eclipse-square>. If you're willing to spend some time on this site you can watch the “shadow” of the eclipse as it traversed the U.S., manually controlling its position with your mouse. Because Austin was just off to the side of the ideal path, we saw the “new moon” version, where the moon covered most of the sun's disk to produce the image seen in the picture at right. Note the site above describes everything you need to know to safely observe eclipses, including places to obtain glasses to allow direct observation. Without such you need to use indirect methods: *never look directly at the sun, even with dark sunglasses!* One of the best projected images I've seen, shown in the picture here, was devised by *Brian Marks* (WCN). Using a small celestial telescope pointed at the sun, he projected the image from the eyepiece onto a flat panel at a distance to produce a relatively large image of the sun as the eclipse progressed. He posted a picture of this image on our Facebook neighborhood group site: <http://goo.gl/4G41rS>. If you belong to the group, search for “eclipse” using the magnifying glass symbol below the green “+Invite” button to see two pinhole camera images posted by *Bryce Sturrock*, then click on “4 comments” under the picture on the right and look for Brian's name.



Brian Mark's setup for watching the eclipse

It's easy to make your own pinhole camera viewer, as shown on this PC Magazine site: <https://tinyurl.com/PinClipse>. The NASA “cereal box” viewer – which makes viewing the bright image in a dark environment - is described in a YouTube video there. Even easier ways to project the image are shown; next time we can get ready on short notice!

So: If you haven't already, now you can be ready for the MUCH BETTER total eclipse which also will be viewable in Austin on April 8th. One veteran eclipse viewer suggests, despite the differences seeming small, a total eclipse is much more impressive, like “eating a hamburger rather than seeing a picture of a hamburger”. Day becomes night for a few minutes, which can feel like magic and engender the same feelings prehistoric people felt.

*The sun and moon appear to be the same size in the sky because of an astonishing coincidence:
the moon is 400 times smaller but 400 times closer.*

Heavy Junk Removed from Walnut Creek With Determined Teamwork!

The Walnut Creek Neighborhood's namesake, Walnut Creek, is a wonderful asset not found in most places where humans live in Austin. Native Americans – as evidenced by arrowheads and other artifacts still found there, lived along its banks for millennia, and neighbors and visitors find solace there today (you can join the *Morning Mindfulness Group* there on most Saturdays; see the newsletter for July-Aug 2023 at www.wcnanews.com). WCNA, led for decades by Gary Brewer and his wife Margaret, has spent – and spends - many hours maintaining the trails through our local park, Walnut Bluffs Trailhead, to keep the area clean and as natural as possible. The city and the Austin Parks Foundation provide support for some of these efforts, the rest are provided by volunteers, mostly from the neighborhood. Watch our social media for announcements of opportunities to participate in these outings.

A naturally self-flushing (i.e., flooding) feature with secluded access points like our creek tends to draw people who want to rid themselves of (i.e., dump) their human-generated refuse, and people have been doing this for as long as “modern” Austin has been here. As the density of homes and apartments has increased along the creek winding through the city, the opportunities for people to do this unseen have decreased (excluding the collection of homeless folks who frequently – and currently - camp in the park), but the cumulative effect of dumping along the creek over so many years has resulted in sizable amounts of trash in and along the creekbed.

WCN resident and UT biologist (and dog fosterer) Wendy Hodges has personal and professional interest in creek environments and has traversed Walnut Creek from origin to the river. From her many times in our section of the creek she mapped out particular sections containing significant amounts and types of trash, especially heavy items. She identified the stretch below the end of Cedar Valley Cove as a particularly good target for this effort because of the access provided by a concrete channel to the creek.

The Walnut Creek Safety Team, led by Christian Ninaud, promoted and organized the effort. An approximately mile-long portion of the creek below the end of the Cedar Valley Cove cul-de-sac was targeted for removal of large articles that have accumulated over time. Notable among these were “grocery carts”, most probably used to haul stuff for use by homeless “campers” but also just dumped into the creek from the neighborhood or neighborhoods upstream from us. As pieces wash down the creek they tend to partially bury and trap other detritus being carried by the currents. This kind of dumping is likely to continue as long as humans produce enormous quantities of unwanted stuff without also producing the means to cycle it back into useful stuff; More such cleanups are likely.

Fruit, tacos and coffee were provided by Bunnie and Dorsey Twidwell, at the center of the table in the picture at right. The other volunteers around them, left to right, are Joseph and Lisa Pelletier (without musical instruments), Gary Brewer, Christian Ninaud, Wendy Hodges, Beau (volunteered after seeing the notice at the trailhead), and Sara Breuer (Eric and Emily Shaughnessy are behind the camera). Cynthia Gesotti also took part but is not shown.

Our intrepid volunteers ventured in to the creek, which was quite low after years of drought. Note: Travis is still in “severe drought status according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. This worked to the team's advantage, making it a little easier (continued below)



to get to and extricate the large items, many of which were partially buried and quite heavy. As usual, our superhero - the Kubota Kid (Gary Brewer) – came to the rescue. After articles were dragged/carried to the lower end, he used his marvelous machine to drag them up the concrete chute (bottom left picture) and move them to the trailhead, as seen in the bottom right picture. The crew worked nearly four hours to accomplish their task!

The neighborhood thanks you all so much!!!

This is a bit scary, though rare.

And we don't need more scary things this time of year, do we?

Bridget Grumet in the Oct 22 Austin Statesman described the experience of an Austin family who have lived in their mortgage-free single-family home for many years. When they started the process this year of protesting their appraisal with TCAD, they found they didn't own their home! Records showed a new owner: a deed had been filed electronically via Simplifile, and it was clearly a fake. It turns out that electronically filed deeds bounce through the bureaucratic maze without ever requiring verification of the identity of the applicant (deeds filed in person would require this) and all the surrounding information was phony. Besides the fear that someone would show up and claim possession of their home, there was/is no process by which this can be corrected by the real owners themselves, even though it's clear at all levels that the filed documents are fake. The family is responsible for making the corrections via the legal procedures to change the deed, and their legal fees have already surpassed \$10K! This scam is easier to pull with paid-off mortgages because there's nobody making regular checks of status. It's still a rare thing, and Grumet doesn't say whether anybody has actually lost their property in this way, but the message is clear: The appropriate governing agencies should have the responsibility of verifying these electronic transactions are correct, just as they do when they're done personally. One solution which will greatly help is "in process", and already in place in Williamson and Hays counties: property owners can/will be able to sign up to be notified of any change in a property record with their name on it.

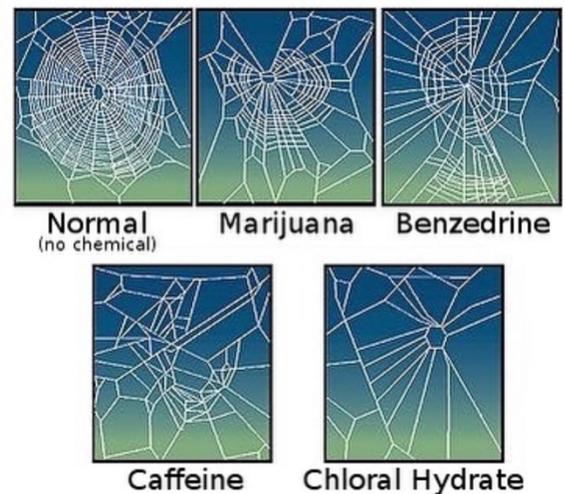
Ever Wonder if the Drug You're Imbibing is Having Any Effect?

In 1948, Swiss pharmacologist Peter Witt studied the effect of drugs on spiders. He conducted an experiment in which he dosed the spiders by feeding them drugged flies or by giving them a drop of a drug in water. He then photographed their webs before and after the drugs were administered. These were the results.

In 1957, researchers noted that spiders on low doses of LSD were "unaware of outside influences and concentrated on the job." Their webs showed consistent regularity. On depressants, "they 'forgot' to finish what they had started and the result was a very ineffective food gathering device."

Note: Benzedrine is an amphetamine and Chloral Hydrate is a sedative/hypnotic.

(<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/bs.3830160109>)



The WCNA 2023 Fall Neighborhood-Wide Garage and Craft Sale had mixed results.

The second WCNA garage / craft sale of 2023 was held on Oct 21st, as recommended via polling of previous participants and residents. October is a desirable month, for obvious reasons, and for the same reasons it is one of the most popular months for events in Austin. The date was chosen in part to help improve traffic to the Pumpkin Patch at St. Mark and to avoid some major events happening during the month. Reports from many of the 18 participants were mixed, with some doing quite well and others experiencing notably less traffic than last year. Some of this may have been affected by fewer participants and the geographical distribution of them, as some sites were somewhat "isolated" from the rest, possibly reducing their traffic flow. The general feeling from reporting participants was still a desire to have two events per year; many have suggested ways to attract more attendance.

Here They Come Again: Changes to Austin's Land Development Code

The attempt about five years ago (called *Code Next*) to revise our zoning laws got “very messy” and resulted in no change in Austin’s 30-plus-year-old rules. The primary motivation for updating them was to increase the density of human residency in the city, as envisioned by the Urbanist movement – see

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Urbanism. The rules would allow building houses closer together and relax requirements to build multi-family homes. The intent is understandable: minimize the “urban sprawl” which is the driver of so many of the problems with our modern existence, especially the effects of the “dominance” of the automobile. The congestion created by car commuting, most typically with only one passenger per car, is also a strong motivator of attempts to improve and popularize public transportation. The resistance to such change in Austin lies largely with people and places like *Walnut Creek Neighborhood*, with our large lots containing single-family homes. The desire for such homes motivates people to move out of the city and commute in.

Let’s face it: we in WCN have the “best of both worlds” with our special properties so close to the city, so we can expect to be threatened with change frequently until it eventually happens. With development of The Domain and resulting rapid area apartment construction, we are now considered more central than north Austin.

Renewed government activity toward changing the zoning codes is here. The latest proposed changes are being considered by the Planning Commission (PC) and City Council. Public hearings have been held and more are planned (<https://tinyurl.com/AusZone23>). These represent perhaps our best chance for our opinions to be heard (literally), with the exception of city elections. In a first-time ever event on Oct 26th, the Council and PC met in Council chambers for the purpose of hearing input from citizens, following brief presentations from the city staff. The meeting lasted almost seven hours, with many speakers on both sides of the first proposed changes. These changes would allow multiple living units on a single lot zoned currently as SF1 (for single-family residence). Further changes would reduce the minimum lot size for a dwelling under SF1 from the current 5750 to a (startling) 2500 square feet (less than the footprint of many of our houses).

Our council member, Leslie Pool, is leading the council in making these changes, surprising many residents in ours and nearby neighborhoods. The changes would allow up to three dwelling units on a single SF1 lot, depending on its size, and the units could include “Tiny Homes”. These changes drew a full house for the joint meeting. From speaker comments, the majority seemed to support the changes, as does the majority of the City Council. Proponents anticipate increasing affordability with the increasing density; opponents doubt responses of developers to make this happen unless somehow required or incentivized under the new rules.

The second public meeting, with the Planning Commission, is scheduled for Nov. 14, 6:00 p.m., at City Hall, 301 W. Second St. A third meeting with the City Council is scheduled at City Hall on Dec 7th at 10:00 a.m.

If you want to speak at one of these you must sign up at <https://www.publicinput.com/LDCupdates>.

Note: You can watch City Council meetings live at <https://www.austintexas.gov/watch-atxn-live>.

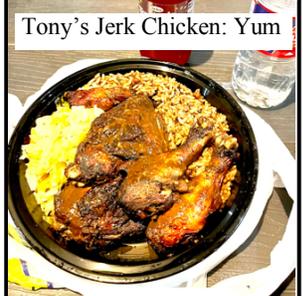
The United States Mint recently selected Jovita Idár

(from Texas) to be on the ninth coin in the U.S. Mint's [American Women Quarters Program](#). The quarter-dollar began circulation on Aug. 14th, 2023. From the Mint: “Jovita Idár was a Mexican-American journalist, activist, teacher, and suffragist. She devoted her life to fighting against separatist ideologies and sought to create a better future for Mexican-Americans.” Born in Laredo in 1885, Idár died in San Antonio in 1946.

The obverse (“heads”) side for all the “Women Quarters” is a profile of George Washington, but not the one first selected in 1932 to mark Washington’s 200 birthday. This one was designed for that same competition by a woman artist, Laura Gardin Fraser, one of the most prolific women sculptors of the early 20th century. *Ain’t it cool! Engraving on her blouse shows many of her newspapers and great accomplishments!*



It was a quiet opening, but our mouth-watering dreams came true: **Tony's Jamaican Food** @ *Mi Yaad* outdoor restaurant and food truck park is open to the public! as seen in Kim Scott's video post (October 28th on the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Group Facebook site <https://tinyurl.com/JaimacFood>). Tony and Kim bought the property in 2022, providing pads for Food Trucks and planning to open food service when all the details could be worked out. **That time has arrived!** *Tony's is at the corner of Meadow Lark and the street that runs between Meadow Lark and Sandpiper below the I35 access road.*



Dues and Contributions Form for Calendar Year 2024

Please clip and return with payment, or use PayPal (see below).

Dues for 2024 are \$25 Please note desired distribution for contributions over that amount.

NAME _____

PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____

DUES (\$25 per year): \$ _____

DONATION: General Fund \$ _____ Walnut Bluffs Trails (park) \$ _____ Safety Team \$ _____

Walnut Creek Elementary \$ _____ Cat Coalition \$ _____

TOTAL INCLUDED: \$ _____



QR Code to pay dues or donate

You can use PayPal for both dues & contributions.

PayPal 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, <https://wcnanews.com/membership/>

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**

The National Suicide/Mental Crisis Hotline: 988

Trans Hotline: 877-565-8860

City: All services, codes & code violations, animal reports: **Call 311**

[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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Walnut Creek Neighborhood

Association membership is open to any resident (owner or renter) or property owner within its boundaries:

Braker to Yeager and
Lamar to IH35

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 issues.

Payment also may be via PayPal:
<https://wcnanews.com/membership/>

To check whether you've paid your dues for this or next calendar year, call or text Pat at 512 659-8132 or email s.pitt@earthlink.net

To contribute content to the newsletter: wcnanews.contact@gmail.com and/or contact Pat Pitt, 512 837-6620

Note:

The opinions expressed in articles printed in this newsletter are the explicit opinions of the writer(s) and, unless explicitly stated, are not to be implied as the opinions of either the editor or the Board of Directors of Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association, Inc.

Calendar of Events

Nov	15	A Christmas Affair - https://www.jlaustin.org/a-christmas-affair/
	17	Blue Genie Arts Bazaar - https://bluegenieartbazaar.com
	18-19	East Austin Studio Tour - https://www.bigmedium.org/austinstudiotour
	22	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	20-24	AISD Fall Break
	23	Thanksgiving Day
	28	Giving Tuesday - https://iliveheregivehere.org/givingtuesday
Dec	2	Holiday Sing-Along and Holiday Stroll - https://downtownaustin.com/what-we-do/signature-events/holiday-stroll/
	6	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	15-23	Armadillo Christmas Bazaar - https://armadillobazaar.com
	20	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	21	Winter begins
	22	AISD winter holiday break (21 December 2023 - 8 January 2024)
	24	Last day for Blue Genie Arts Bazaar
	25	Christmas
Jan	31	New Year's Eve
	1	New Year's Day
	3	Blue Recycle Container Picked Up: Curbside by 7:00 a.m.
	9	AISD classes resume
	15	Martin Luther King Jr. Day - Banks and Post Office Closed