

Austin, Texas

April 10, 2005

Barton Hills News

What's going on in our neighborhood

Neighborhood Planning Continues – Neighborhood Watch Returns
Barton Hills Experiences Lush Springtime

From the Corresponding Secretary:
Barton Hills as Garden

Ah, the glories of wildflowers, birds, and butterflies! Just about everything in our neighborhood is springing, opening, blooming, and booming. Thanks to abundant rains, we've more grass to mow, shrubs to trim, and general upkeep to perform. As if any of us needs an excuse to be outside, now we can lavish attention on our long-dormant yards.

Within these pages and at our upcoming BHNA meeting, we'll be pondering such questions as property deed restrictions and neighborhood planning. Most of us residents, especially the homeowners, take justifiable pride in the tidiness and functionality of our homes and lawns—that's a major reason why we've chosen to live here. And, for most people, their home is their biggest purchase. You want to keep up the value of this investment. The city as a whole enforces health and safety codes regarding tall weeds and inoperable vehicles. Restrictive covenants tighten such rules regarding fences, "granny flats," and outbuildings. Most of these rules involve common sense, but others are more aesthetically derived. Yet, tastes change.

Last issue, yours truly raised some exploratory questions about the future of Barton Hills in a self-reliant context. One of the most fundamental questions a society can ask is, "Where do we get our food?" I suggested a future requiring less energy and a more localized economy, including regionally produced food.

The original thought behind Suburbia was that of a single-family country home surrounded by a

garden, a package within financial reach of average middle-class citizens. In fact, at least one old Austin neighborhood, Hyde Park, in its earliest days between 1910 and the mid-20s, boasted abundant vegetable gardens and chicken houses. Residents were able to produce most of their food right outside their doors. The widespread use of the automobile changed all that but, with fuel prices continuing to soar, we might indeed be rebuilding such an at-hand food system.

Also in the last newsletter issue, I mentioned the compact city concept as a way of accommodating the new Austinites as the city grows. At least one gentleman commented that it would be fine to welcome new residents to the area—as long as they don't try to live in our neighborhood. Such an attitude might imply that this subdivision's population is already at maximum. I'm not sure if I know what that maximum number is, but I'd propose that these acres could accept quite a greater number of people, as long as they didn't bring cars.

With these thoughts spring more questions: How many readers of this newsletter cultivate vegetable gardens? How many Barton Hill folk enjoy fruit and nuts from their own trees? How many enjoy surplus produce from a neighbor's garden? Who would love to tend a vegetable garden of your own if you had the time? How many pay a worker to establish and maintain a vegetable garden in your yard (business idea)?

Let the dialogue continue!

Howie Richey

Message from the President

Springtime in Austin and the living is easy! And once again Barton Hills neighbors are enjoying the beauty and fellowship of our community with picnics, walks, hikes in the Greenbelt, bicycling, outdoor concerts, and especially paying their membership dues to BHNA and reminding their neighbors to do so also!

Our first meeting of the year was a great success, building on the momentum of last year. Neighborhood planning continues to be a major focus and since the City of Austin has again postponed our place in the official queue (now October 2005, but who knows), we have definitely achieved our goal of getting "out front" of this official process. In fact, we will be one of the most prepared neighborhoods ever to plan their future. For our next general meeting, which is April 12th, Terry Harris, Barton Hills resident and property law attorney, has generously agreed to discuss the various issues regarding deed restrictions, zoning, etc. and to answer your questions. So come well briefed and take advantage of this great opportunity. Also, as part of the ongoing discussion of Zilker Botanical Gardens begun last meeting with Craig Naizor's user fee proposal, Melvin Hinson, manager of Zilker Botanical Gardens, will present a different perspective on the future effective management of the Gardens. Please see his article in this newsletter.

I am thrilled that John Luther has volunteered to be the Director of our Neighborhood Watch. This is a demanding enough job when done well, and John will certainly surpass all expectations. So I encourage you to get involved in this endeavor. Remember, this is not just about keeping our community safe; it is about keeping it a caring, friendly and enjoyable place to live. John will provide an update on his new ideas and activities for the BHNA NW at our April 12th meeting and please do come ready to be overwhelmed by how much this program as envisioned by John can do for us. And there are a great variety of ways you can participate to fit all schedules and interests. Please read his article in this newsletter.

It is also time to start thinking about July 4th! Shannon Noble and Valinda Bolton were outstanding chairs of the July 4th parade last year and the fruition of all their work and that of the volunteers was a wonderful celebration, beginning with a mile-long parade of creative and festive floats and patriots, and full of activities for kids of all ages, speechifying worthy of Lincoln, amazing music and singing, watermelon, piñatas, and much more. AND rain or shine, we will again celebrate this year! We need new volunteers to plan and coordinate this effort so please answer this call for volunteers!! We will discuss this at the meeting.

Last year, we started a new babysitting service on behalf of many members who have not been able to come to meetings because of needing to stay home with children. However, we need for folks to sign up a week ahead of time to ensure there is enough demand to warrant a babysitter. Simply send an email to any member of the BHNA Executive Committee and let us know how many children you are bringing.

The agenda for the April 12th meeting is full and a must-attend event. It also includes an open forum for members to bring up any item they wish. I wish to extend a very special thanks to Debby Kalk, BHNA VP, who is serving as president in my absence, as I have a schedule conflict. But I will be there in spirit. Keep up your great engagement in our shared community life. Thanks!

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Don Long, President, 2005

Membership Missive

We appreciate the many residents who helped make our BHNA effective by completing the 2005 Membership Survey. Questions ranged from newsletter format and business referrals to issues and opportunities. Most respondents wanted to help deter crime and maintain the Greenbelt, while a sizable number were eager to aid the neighborhood planning process. The most important concerns were traffic, security, and safety, with sidewalks bringing in an honorable mention.

The Executive Committee will use feedback from the survey to plan our programs and guide our decisions. Look for other surveys on specific topics in the months ahead, but, of course, you're encouraged to make your voice heard anytime. Let us know what's on your mind for improving life in Barton Hills.

Join or Renew Your Membership

At \$10 per year, your BHNA membership is a great value. Your membership gives you the right to vote on all issues considered at our quarterly General Meetings. You can also participate in our popular BHNA Listserv (an email-based communications program), and you'll receive all issues of our quarterly newsletter.

Become a Friend of Barton Hills

For a mere \$20 per year, you can become a Friend of Barton Hills and support programs such as our July 4th parade and celebration, our holiday luminaria project, and our award-winning Greenbelt Guardian workdays. Friends get special recognition in our newsletter and on our Website.

Friends of Barton Hills

Kathryn Bender
Bill, Nan, and Glenn Clayton
Teresa Cochran
Chris and Sally Crocker
Don and Diane Long
Don and Susan Madden
Dennis and Nancy McFadden
Sherine Thomas and Tom Nuckols
Fairy Davenport Rutland

Thanks so much for supporting BHNA this year!

Debby Kalk
debby@cortexlearning.com
442-8829

Take a (Side) Walk

The neighborhood sidewalk committee was formed for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, to get continuous sidewalks down Barton Hills Drive from the market up to and around the school. We also would like all of the sidewalks to have wheelchair access, but first things first. In 2003, the city gave us an estimate on two houses within the area that we want sidewalks. Here is an example of how to install a sidewalk under a 50/50 program on 1500 Barton Hills and 2634 Deer Foot:

1. The distance is about 240 ft.
2. The sidewalk will be 4 ft wide.
3. Neighborhood's cost is \$2,467.20.
4. The city will work around the trees, power poles, utility meters to install sidewalk within street right-of-way.
5. The city will restore the disturbed areas with grass sodding or seeding.
6. The city can make minor PVC sprinkler system adjustment or repair, if any. It cannot do the copper line replacement and electrical wiring. The property will need to relocate the system before work begins.

I am currently trying to determine if these numbers still apply. The person who is in charge of this program has changed and the new person is very busy but this gives us an idea of the cost involved. Our idea is to get the sidewalks done yard by yard if that is what it takes. With this program the city will pay half.

So, with that in mind we need to raise some money! We thought that an easy way to do this would be through a Neighborhood Wide Garage Sale. The idea is that we have the Neighborhood Association sponsor the costs of advertising a Garage Sale throughout Barton Hills. Those that want to contribute to the Sidewalk Program bring their sale items to the school and we have a garage sale in the parking lot. Right now, we are thinking that a fall date is in order.

We think this would benefit the neighborhood and in particular the school in many ways. What I would need from the school is a date that we could use the front parking lot. What do you all think?

Jen Stuart

Greenbelt Guardian Glee-Nings

The third time was the charm! After twice rescheduling due to inclement weather, on March 5 the clouds held the rain in check long enough for us to assemble at the Gus Fruh Trail and give it some vigorous tender-loving care. We had twenty-five spirited neighbors show up and put muscle and mind to the tasks at hand. And there were plenty of tasks! Together, we contributed 90 hours of service to our Greenbelt in a convivial atmosphere.

At the end of the day, there were large mounds of ligustrum carcasses spread throughout the top portion of the trail. They had been converted from invasive pests to new homesteads for wildlife. The Invasive Species Crew was enthusiastic and merciless!

And one-half of the switchback trail now sports new "drainage bars" to more effectively drain the water across the trail and down the steep hillside with minimal erosion, due to the hard labor of our Drainage Crew. If you haven't walked it, try it. There is a stark difference between the top half and the bottom half of the trail at this point. We took on an ambitious project of renovating the drainage system and resurfacing the entire trail, much of which was severely pocked and eroded. It will take us several trail work days to complete the project. We are optimistic that this work will restore the trail to its former wheelchair-accessible status.

The entrance to the trail was tidied, pulling back invading ivy and the small host of sticker weeds that were popping back up (a much-reduced population after last year's weeding frenzy), and re-establishing the lines of the rock border. Our Clean-up Crew came upon a tangle of old barbed wire ranch fencing and wrestled with it, bringing it to the trailhead to be hauled off with the bags of bottles, cans, and cast-off clothing.

Upcoming Work Day: April 23, 9:00 to 2:00

On Saturday, April 23, we will be participating in the city-wide program, *It's My Park Day* for work on both of our trails: Gus Fruh and Homedale. We have developed quite a skilled core team of trail leaders and workers, and both trails are in need of our attention. The Austin Parks Foundation, which sponsors the city program, is helping us recruit additional volunteers through their website and other promotional activities.

To date, we have commitments from two groups of young volunteers: The University of Texas Service Group and the Travis County Juvenile Probation - Community Service Group. We will need the help of our neighborhood volunteers to guide the process and balance all that youth with wisdom!

Please come join us for a hopefully beautiful spring day sprucing up our Greenbelt trails. We are bound to have lots of fun and the reward of a day well spent with visible results that many others can enjoy.

Please RSVP to: gleeful@earthlink.net to sign up for the trail work day. You can come for all or part of the day. If you have a request for which trail you would like to work on, let me know. Otherwise, I will assign as needed. Stan Ostrum will be guiding the work at the Gus Fruh trail and I will be guiding the work at the Homedale Trail. John Cook, our COA Parks Partner, will be trailboss for the Gus Fruh trail renovation efforts.

BHE Report Card

Spring is a busy time at Barton Hills Elementary. We are involved in lots of activities and projects in the classrooms and around our campus.

Spring is also the time for Kindergarten Round-Up. We would like to invite all incoming kindergarten

students and their parents to join us on Tuesday, May 3rd from 9:00 - 10:00 to learn about the kindergarten curriculum and get a head start on all the registration paperwork. We will have activities for the children while parents are "learning." When you come to register, please bring the following (we will make copies here):

- Birth Certificate

- Proof of residence (electric bill, gas bill, lease agreement, sales contract)
- Immunization Records
- Student Social Security Card
- Parent’s driver’s license

We look forward to meeting you!

Barton Hills is pleased to announce that Sarah Tso was chosen as our Teacher of the Year. Many of you may know her as Sarah Thomasson, daughter of Dee Ann and Mike. Sarah Tso, our terrific Teacher of the Year, went to elementary school right here at Barton Hills! She moved to Ortega Elementary as a diversity choice for 4th-6th grades. Then, years later, after graduating from Southwest Texas State, she came back to teach at both her elementary schools! Sarah was a gymnast and a basketball star while in high school at Austin High. Her degree is in Interdisciplinary Studies with a specialization in Physical Education. During her student teaching in a 3rd grade class, she fell in love with classroom teaching. She just adores her teaching team here at Barton Hills.

When she’s not huddled together with her team, Ms. Tso has some very interesting hobbies. She stays busy with gardening or cooking or cross-stitching. She loves all things related to New Orleans: jazz, Cajun food, and art. She loves her two dogs and her new cat and, believe it or not, she loves to collect classic monsters. Maybe she’ll use some of the cutest monsters in the children’s book she’s writing. We want the multi-talented Ms. Tso to teach here forever and ever!

Please watch our marquee for any other school events and activities. As always, if you have any questions, please call 414-2103.

Kati Achterman



Property Expert Coming to April 12 Meeting

Just what are those pesky Deed Restrictions?

Remember the thrill of becoming a Barton Hills homeowner? Remember the stacks of legal papers that were signed and initialed? Buried in those papers were the Deed Restrictions that cover your particular subdivision within the Barton Hills

Neighborhood Association. There are approximately 150 separate subdivisions within the BHNA boundaries. That’s right—150 separate subdivisions, each with its own set of deed restrictions! Luckily, each set of deed restrictions is almost identical. Just what do the deed restrictions say though? And who (or what) enforces them?

Jerry Harris, a partner with the law firm of Brown McCarroll and a BHNA resident, attended the March 8 Executive Committee meeting and gave both the Executive Committee and Neighborhood Planning Committee a crash course on Texas property law. He will be at our next General Meeting on April 12 to make a presentation to the entire association.

The deed restrictions are on file with the county and can be obtained at the Travis County Clerk’s office at 5501 Airport Blvd. You’ll need to know the official description of your lot to find the deed restrictions for your house. Deed restrictions are normally put in place by the original developer and are used to provide some uniformity and consistency to the subdivision. They can cover all sorts of things but the ones in our area primarily restrict additional structures being placed on lots and the type of fences allowed.

The original deed restrictions in our area also called for the creation of an “Architectural Control Committee” to oversee requests for waivers of the deed restrictions. However, the restrictions list several prohibitions that cannot be waived under any circumstances. The original Architectural Control Committees have become defunct—but that doesn’t mean that the deed restrictions are defunct. Individual homeowners can file lawsuits to stop construction or additions to property that are a violation of the deed restrictions. Texas law gives deed restrictions superior status over other City zoning ordinances or neighborhood planning. According to attorney Harris, the burden is on the homeowner wanting to do something in violation of the deed restrictions to prove that the deed restrictions should be voided.

So pull out your deed restrictions and come to the general meeting with your questions for Jerry Harris. You’ll be glad you did!

Neighborhood Watch Moves Closer to Reinstatement

BH residents already feel safer . . .

Neighborhood Watch Returns

Beginning in February, the BHNA began the process of reviving the Neighborhood Watch (NW) program in the Barton Hills/Horseshoe Bend area. The initial resident response has been quite positive, and already many residents have volunteered to participate in this highly effective program.

Neighborhood Watch is a crime prevention effort that enlists the active participation of citizens in cooperation with law enforcement to reduce illegal activity in the neighborhood. Law enforcement agencies consider it to be perhaps the most effective means available for keeping crime out of neighborhoods. This is because it uses the most effective crime fighting tool ever invented—a watchful neighbor.

The eyes and ears of alert residents participating in a Neighborhood Watch program multiply the chances of stopping a crime before it happens. Neighbors working together are a proven deterrent to burglaries, auto theft, and vandalism, greatly increasing the chances of identifying perpetrators of crimes and bringing about speedy arrests.

Local law enforcement agencies encourage and support NW programs. The Austin Police Department has assisted in establishing our current program and is committed to working with the BHNA to see that it is successful. Special thanks go to APD Officer Dawn Leonard and APD Community Liaison Mario Renteria for all their personal help in reviving NW in Barton Hills.

Besides crime prevention, however, there is another aspect of Neighborhood Watch. It is also a way to bring neighbors together and to identify possible special needs of someone on your block. Joe or Jean may need a little extra assistance due to age or health problems. By knowing your neighbors, you not only contribute to their safety, you could make the difference in their quality of life. So, look around and see where you can make a difference. The possibilities as a participant in the NW program are many.

I encourage each of you to become a participant in this vital program of mutual safety, security, and caring. Registration forms will be available from me anytime and at the next meeting. I look forward to seeing you there.

John Luther

Don's Letter to APD (exp.)

March 23, 2005

Sergeant Ron Lara, Austin Police Department

Dear Sergeant Lara:

On behalf of the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association (BHNA), it is my pleasure to commend Officer Dawn Leonard as not only an exemplary APD community liaison to our neighborhood, but also an extraordinary person, professional, and role model for public service and the Austin Police Department. While our community deeply regrets that she is moving to another position and will sincerely miss her, we also wish to express our appreciation for her unsurpassed service and to give our support for her continuing success.

Officer Leonard has been exceptional in meeting the twin challenge of a good police officer: serving the public and enforcing the law. From the very start, she initiated an open and productive dialogue with our residents by participating in our neighborhood meetings, joining our community listserv to better understand our concerns, and, most importantly, always being accessible and approachable, and simply being a very positive and enjoyable presence in our community. She excelled as an ombudsman and problem-solver in countless situations. She always displayed very good judgment, creativity, resourcefulness, and fairness in all her relationships and interactions.

Again, I wholeheartedly commend Officer Dawn Leonard and the APD Community Liaison program. Please share this letter of appreciation as you deem appropriate.

Sincerely, Don W. Long

Other Neighborhood Items

Austin Neighborhoods Council Report

March 23, 2005, ANC MEETING

AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Board of Trustees voted to annex territory within the City of Austin not already in the ACC taxing district. The reasons are:

1. Access to quality higher education would become less expensive for thousands of current and prospective students.
2. Annexation would more fairly distribute the ACC tax burden throughout the City of Austin.
3. Annexation would increase net revenue to ACC district by \$6.46 million annually.

H.B. 2833 is an Act relating to regulatory takings. This proposed bill made the agenda because it may apply to the zoning authority of a municipality. To read the text, go to http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/legislation/bill_status.htm and type in HB2833 and hit the submit button. Kevin will research further and report to ANC.

THE ANC NOW ENDORSES CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES. Candidates for city council responded to a questionnaire that can be viewed by going to the following page, <http://www.ancweb.org/council.htm>. The candidates were present at the March ANC meeting and answered questions regarding their answers to the questionnaire. The candidates left after the questions. There were motions to endorse candidates. This is important. The motion to endorse candidates means that someone motioned to endorse Lee Leffingwell, for example. Then a second motion, then a vote. Personally, I believe that every candidate should have received

votes with the winner getting the endorsement.

How I voted:

Place 1 - I abstained. ANC endorsed Lee Leffingwell.
Place 3 - There was a motion to vote for two candidates. On this motion I voted no. The two candidates were Mandy Dealey and Margot Clarke. The reason I voted no was that Mandy Dealey had marked 18 NRs (no responses) out of 33 questions. I felt that was not fair to the other candidates who responded to the questions. In fact, the questionnaire didn't seem to have much influence on voting. It seems votes were based on which candidate would ultimately be responsive to the ANC. The motion to endorse two candidates failed. Then there was a motion to endorse Margot Clarke. I abstained. ANC endorsed Margot Clarke.
Place 4 - Motion not to endorse anyone. I abstained. ANC didn't endorse anyone.

Eddie Torres,
BHNA Delegate to ANC

Dedicated Funds in the BHNA Account

At the February 22, 2005, General Meeting, the Executive Committee was asked to look into the dedicated funds that have been reported by the Treasurer for the last several years. There are three dedicated groups at present: the Oak Wilt Fund has \$82.00; the Officer Jones Memorial Fund has \$40.00; and the Sunken Gardens Fund has \$2,200. The Executive Committee has reviewed the minutes back to June 1998 and makes the following recommendations:

1. The Oak Wilt Fund was created in 1997 or 1998 to help pay for some trenching that was done in 1998 to stop the spread of oak wilt. The Association paid out \$3,600 for trenching in 1998. The remaining \$82 has been carried over from year to year since 1998. The Executive Committee proposes that this money be redirected to the Greenbelt Guardian program.

2. Officer Jones Memorial Fund—Officer Jones was a park policeman who was killed in the line of duty on Memorial Day in 2000. The Association collected private donations and contributed a matching donation to the family in October, 2000. The total amount donated to the family was \$470, sent to the family through the 100 Club of Central Texas, a non-profit group that provides support to families of fallen police officers. It appears that the \$40 that is showing on our books may be the result of a bookkeeping error and that all of the money collected has already been sent to the family. However, since the records are not entirely clear, the Executive Committee proposes that the Association send \$40.00 to Officer Jones' family through the 100 Club of Central Texas.

3. The Sunken Gardens Fund was established in 2000. A committee was formed to submit a grant application to the City Parks Department for the development of a comprehensive plan to restore the Sunken Gardens in Zilker Park to their original design. The application was submitted but the grant was not awarded. The money has stayed in the Association's account. The Executive Committee is working with the City to find out the current status of the Sunken Gardens project. If the project is still viable, the Executive (more)

Still Other Neighborhood Items

Committee proposes that the money be sent to the city for use on the project. The only twist on this is that the Save Our Springs Alliance donated \$1,000 of the \$2,200 in the fund. The Executive Committee will also contact the SOS Alliance to make sure that it still wants the money to go to the Sunken Gardens project.

The above recommendations will be presented to the Association for a vote at the April meeting. Please contact a member of the Executive Committee if you have any questions.

Diana Stangl

Neighbor Profile: John Luther

Next time you visit the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, be sure to look for the model of the Akagi, the Japanese aircraft carrier that led the attack on Pearl Harbor. What's the connection to Barton Hills? The model was created by our resident scale model virtuoso, John Luther. His interest in history made him wonder what things like ships and aircraft actually looked like. He started making models and, over the years, became adept at it. In addition to the Nimitz, his models are in other private collections.

John's connection to Barton Hills extends back 30 years when he moved to Austin to take a job with state government. When he and his wife drove through Barton

Hills, the El Paso natives fell in love with the trees and the greenery. "It's the closest thing to Heaven I'd seen," he said. They saw someone putting a "For Sale" sign out on Briargrove, took a look at the house, made an offer, and have loved living there ever since. Their block has a close-knit group of families that often gets together for potluck dinners, birthday parties, and other get-togethers.

He got involved with Barton Hills Neighborhood Association about six years ago and is now heading up the Neighborhood Watch program. John's learned from experience why getting involved and reporting crimes is important. Three years ago, burglars broke into his car. He didn't bother to report it figuring there was nothing the police would be able to do. He was astonished when the police called him about five days later to ask if he was missing anything—they had made some arrests and found items belonging to him. He was embarrassed to admit to the police that he hadn't bothered to report the crime when it occurred. He hopes all of us will learn from this and be proactive about reporting suspicious and criminal activity.

John's encouraged by the volunteers who have stepped up to serve as block leaders and participants for our Neighborhood Watch program. He envisions a program that does more than monitor the neighborhood for criminal activity. He sees the opportunity for neighbors to

watch out for each other. "We've got the best folks in Texas," he says enthusiastically.

Did you have the opportunity to see the beautiful luminarias that lined Briargrove during the winter holidays? John was involved in that project. One evening when the luminarias were lit, John met a group of Cub Scouts and got to talking with them and their parents. When the kids learned about John's scale models, they clamored to see them and he was delighted to oblige. One of the parents invited John to participate in the Scouts' Pinewood Derby competition. He provided John with a racer kit and John made a racer and had the pleasure of participating in the derby. "It was one of the most fun experiences I've had," he recalled.

So, keep an eye out for all the contributions John Luther makes to the quality of our lives here in Barton Hills!

Note: This is part of an occasional series of profiles of some of our Barton Hills neighbors. Have you been in the neighborhood a while? Do you have some interesting stories to share? We want to hear from you!

Contact Debby Kalk at debby@cortexlearning.com or 442-8829.

Ride the #29 Bus!

Another Perspective on Zilker Botanical Gardens

A GARDEN WITHOUT A USER FEE

The Parks and Recreation Department has been evaluating a proposal over the past several months from a new entity, the non-profit Austin Botanical Garden Foundation, Inc., that has advocated the privatization of management at the Zilker Botanical Garden. The advocates of this approach, including Mr. Craig Nazor who spoke at your last meeting, have requested that the City grant them long-term exclusive use of the facility in the hope that private donors will come forth with funds for a substantial future development plan of the Garden and with a belief that these "improvements" can only occur without the City in charge. The proposal has also been presented to the Parks Board, whose members are charged with advising the City Council on such proposals affecting City-owned parkland.

The proposal has evolved since it was first presented to PARD. Originally, the main elements of this unique partnership were a conceptual plan for an onsite butterfly house in three years and a new visitor center located on Stratford Drive facing Town Lake within 5 years, based on a 5-year business plan that covered the facility operations and management as it changed from public to private hands. The City's cost of operations at Zilker Botanical Garden was to be reduced incrementally to zero over that transition period. Now, the Foundation has requested that the City subsidize the private effort at \$500,000 per year, provide free utilities, assist in proposed site development of the facility, give up portions of the overflow parking area north of Stratford Drive for a designated parking area, retain City staff and equipment for the routine operation of the facility, and allow the Foundation to raise and keep all types of revenue without any City oversight. All of these conditions are presumably necessary because private donors and grants do not give money for operating expenses, preferring to contribute to more prestigious capital development efforts. Their request for a 25-year implementing agreement remains silent on the financial plans, needs and expenses of years 6 through 25. Their future vision for the facility to become a "world class botanical garden" will lie solely with the Foundation's board of directors, not the Austin community nor Zilker Park stakeholders.

The rationale for the proposed change seems to be that the Parks and Recreation Department cannot and does not take care of its garden facilities. This is not true. The past three years of economic downturn in Austin have presented an unprecedented challenge to City government efforts as a whole. Declines in the Zilker Botanical Garden's operating budget can be traced to retirements by the most senior gardening staff and the internal policy of cost containment through freezes on open positions rather than layoffs of existing staff.

That drove the unit's budget efficiency measure to a low of \$0.62 per visitor for fiscal year 2001-02; however, PARD management has added staff from other units (equivalent of two FTEs in 2003 and another in 2004) to maintain the facility's maintenance efforts that are not reflected in the unit's budget total. In the current budget, the annual budget is \$479K plus the two FTEs from the experienced Town Lake Corridor crew. This level of expenditures is the highest in the last 5 years, reflecting a return to sustainable operating levels and doubling the cost per visitor spent to \$1.24.

Over the past 50 years, the City has participated in a joint partnership with the non-profit Austin Area Garden Council to maintain and operate the Garden Center and the surrounding grounds. The AAGC undertook the education activities and the daily operation of the Garden Center, whereas PARD concentrated on the grounds. They used the majority of their \$150-200K annual budgets to fulfill those program activities along with memorial donations and other gifts. These funds, also spent for the benefit of the Zilker Botanical Garden, have supplemented the City's budget contribution. The status and role of the AAGC under a new private entity remains murky; the Foundation's business plan seems to absorb the education function in terms of a Director of Education and perhaps the facility operation activities until the Visitor Center comes online.

City administration has recognized the need for more funds and acted to approve fees for many Garden user groups to raise total revenue available to the Zilker Botanical Garden. The City Council has approved a weekend parking fee for the Garden (\$3 per day) that will be collected during the peak park use season (March 12-Labor day) and we have collected almost \$4K during the first two weekends of implementation. Fees for commercial photography, weddings and other events on the grounds, and third-party rental fees for the Garden Center building have also been approved. These fees will be fully implemented as staffing permits and consultation with those user groups has occurred. The Botanical Garden also has capital projects included within the evolving 2006 bond proposal. The impact of new revenues will allow us to increase permanent staff numbers and professionalism during the planned PARD reorganization this fall and fund continuing improvements on the grounds. The net benefit will be an attractive, functional and sustainable Botanical Garden long into the future without an entrance fee.

Melvin Hinson
Manager, Zilker Botanical Garden

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BHNA General Meeting Agenda

In This Issue

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

St. Mark's Episcopal Church

**6:00 to 7:00 p.m., Meet and Greet Social Outside on Deck
BBQ and Peach Cobbler from Green Mesquite**

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

General Meeting

Opening Business

Neighborhood Watch

Zilker Gardens User Fee:

Melvin Hinson

Planning Series: Jerry Harris

Updates:

Membership Survey

Budget Details

ANC Report: Eddie Torres

Committee Reports:

Greenbelt Guardian: Glee

Sidewalks: Jen Stuart

Open Forum: any member

Adjourn

Babysitting (\$5 per child) for entire General Meeting

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NW Form (insert)	
Greenbelt Guardians	
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More!	

BHNA
2802 Oak Park Drive
Austin, Texas 78704

Barton Hills News

The newsletter of the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association is published quarterly and is supported by the advertisements of our generous sponsors. It is distributed in print to every home in Barton Hills in February and June, and only to paid Association Members in April and October.