

Austin, Texas

February 5, 2005

Barton Hills News

What's going on in our neighborhood

Neighborhood Planning Continues – Neighborhood Watch Returns Barton Hills High Expectation for Full Participation and Deliberation

From the Corresponding Secretary:

Barton Hills as Village

It's a new year with copious new challenges and opportunities. As a neighborhood, we're excited about the upcoming planning process that, for some, has already begun. It was my pleasure, for instance, to attend an Envision Central Texas session during its initial round. It was recently endorsed by Mayor Will Wynn, who calls for bond elections next year to fund parkland and infrastructure improvements in line with the denser urban development, less sprawl, and open space preservation the citizen planners desire. If the area's population really will double in the next 20 years (which I personally doubt), we as a city need to decide now where everyone will live.

The other group Southwest Trails and Greenbelt Planning Day last October asks Austinites to imagine a continuous greenbelt trail stretching from Town Lake through Zilker Park, past Barton Springs pool all the way to the Wildflower Center and beyond, eventually into the Texas Hill Country. Both workshops let various small break-out groups pore over and draw maps of future development patterns and enhancements.

It's great to live in a municipality and neighborhood that's this actively involved with quality-of-life issues and that's willing to put forth the extra volunteer effort required to bring these visions into reality. Thinking more towards the cutting edge of these activities, however, I've allowed my thinking to venture a little farther towards a truly green city.

As fossil fuels become more expensive and less available, we'll seek a way of life that depends less on imported goods and services and more on local self-reliance.

How would things be different if the abundant talents, skills, and interests of our residents were focused solely on the area within our neighborhood's borders? If the myriad of managers, attorneys, doctors, administrators, educators, engineers, craft workers, and service people formed a corporation, what would we produce? What would life be like if Barton Hills were self-sufficient? What if we were in direct control of our own food supply, water system, transportation, taxes, energy, security, and schools? What if a five-minute walk would get you to an open green space, grocery store, or transit point?

We can see around us signs of these trends in the growing popularity of farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, rainwater harvesting, Dillo Dirt, photovoltaics and wind energy systems, Permaculture, and alternative currencies. To these, add home-grown celebrations such as luminarias, block parties, and my own Solstice caroling processions.

All in all, we live in exciting times with never better reason to become friends with the folks next door. Those of us who are involved with our neighborhood are in a prime position to make a difference!

Howie Richey

Message from the President

Greetings from your returning Barton Hills Neighborhood Association (BHNA) President! Looks like I get to have a second term in office too, and after some tense partisan hearings I am happy to say I have my first choice of cabinet members on board for this second administration.

Last year was exhilaratingly busy and eventful. The events and accomplishments of our work together are important and worth highlighting below. I know I enjoy the many memories and cherish the friendships and fun that we as BHNA members helped to make possible. But I hope we also planted a seed of something vital and worth continuing to explore this year. It is simply the value of generosity of spirit, sense of community, right here at home, in our daily lives, face-to-face, unplanned, spontaneous, natural. I know this exists in many close-knit streets (Briargrove and the luminaria project are an example; Farnswood Circle, and many others), and indeed that is why Barton Hills is such a special place. But I have found, at least in my own personal experience, it is difficult to nurture this spirit more deeply and widely because our lives are so busy and full; there just isn't time. And we are so very devoted to service to others, schools, churches, community spirit, civic engagements, mutual concern, causes, and charities outside our neighborhood, that it doesn't seem to be as needed here. Maybe it isn't. But I would like to see. So I hope we can continue to try together to experience it here too, just a little more. To me, this is the very essence of the house meeting dialogues we had last November (see below) and what should guide our planning process this year. Of course, you might think I am saying all this just to make sure you pay your dues, maybe even at the sustainer level, recruit new members, and come to meetings.

Highlights of the last year include:

- Joyous celebration of the traditional July 4th parade (thanks to the leadership of Shannon Noble and Valinda Bolton), generously sponsored by Wells Fargo, anthem by Sara Hickman, kazoo band and float led by Art Stone, keynote addresses by Representative Elliot Naishtat and City Councilmember Daryl Slusher, MCed by Howie Richey, and the many bicycles, strollers, planes, fire engines, dogs, walkers, skaters, watermelon seed spitters, piñata batters, etc.
- Magnificent renewal of an old tradition of holiday lights (thanks to the wonderful dedication of John and Sunny Luther and their neighbors). The luminarias (lighted candles in paper bags) transformed Briargrove Drive into a glorious and serenely beautiful community of lights, and on opening night with caroling so festive with children laughing and running around one of the yards, neighbors visiting on a front porch, hot chocolate for passersby, twinkling lights all up and down the street. Another sign of the generosity of this wonderful neighborhood.
- Powerful overflow of the very wellsprings of democracy—no, not a sewer break but our community's engagement in conversations about our future as preparation for the City of Austin Neighborhood Planning process. This culminated (thanks to Patricia Wilson, professor of Community and Regional Planning, UT School of Architecture, Mark Tirpak, teaching assistant, and her class) in a truly unique class project that is a model for the rest of Austin—make that world—including house meetings last November involving more than 120 people. We will carry this momentum forward at our next BHNA meeting February 22. Please see article in this newsletter.
- A veritable citizen's rebellion against parking fees at the south lot of Barton Springs and a glorious triumph.
- Celebration of the 3rd Austin City Limits Summer Festival in Zilker as both a signature Austin event of good feeling and music and an effective community partnership, having established a constructive relationship with the COA Parks and Recreation Department and ACL producer, Capitol Sports and Entertainment.

**NEXT
GREENBELT GUARDIAN
WORKDAY:
Saturday, Feb. 12
9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Gus Fruh Greenbelt Entry
2642 Barton Hills Drive**

We achieved a great deal working together, made progress on goals set out for the year at this time last year. This is testimony to the amazing vitality and talent in our community and the many individuals who have given so much of themselves to make these things happen. Perhaps best exemplifying our community is our award-winning Greenbelt Guardian program, led by Glee Ingram, which of course continued to flourish in its joining of volunteers, careful planning, purposeful work, and a love of the natural beauty all around us.

I look forward to another great year, one of many shared "pursuits of happiness."

Don Long
President, 2005

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416-0679 (h)

Debby Kalk
Vice President
442-8829 (h)

Scott Smith
Treasurer
707-8610 (h)

Diane Stangl
Recording Secretary
447-5218 (h)

Howie Richey
Corresponding Secretary
444-4550 (h)

Eddie Torres
Austin Neighborhoods
Council Representative
443-2350 (h)

Membership Missive

Dear neighbors,

When I moved to the neighborhood five years ago, I wanted to find out more about my new neighborhood so when I noticed those signs announcing an upcoming BHNA meeting, I attended. People were friendly and welcoming, the issues were important, the presentations timely and informative, and I signed up. It's that easy to get to know what's going on and meeting many of your neighbors here in Barton Hills. Whether you're new to the area or have been here for many years, I encourage you to participate in BHNA. My participation in BHNA just reinforces my enthusiasm for our great jewel of a neighborhood.

Membership Survey

Help make your BHNA membership effective by taking a few minutes to complete the 2005 Membership Survey. We want to focus BHNA's efforts this year on the issues most important to you and your neighbors. The Executive Committee uses this feedback from the survey to plan our programs and to guide our decisions. We will report the results of the survey in our next newsletter. Let us know what's on your mind including your ideas for improving life in Barton Hills.

Also, we want to make our services and communications with our members as effective and efficient as possible. We're considering implementing an online version of the newsletter and developing a referral network on our website. What do you think? We want to hear from you!

Time to Join, Renew, or Upgrade your BHNA Membership! January is the renewal period for BHNA memberships. At \$10 per year, your BHNA membership is a great value. As a member, you have 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 receive all issues of our quarterly newsletter (non-member residents receive newsletters only in January and June).

The qualifications for membership are that you live or own property within BHNA's boundaries (the area bordered by Barton Creek on the west to Barton Springs Rd on the south, Barton Springs Rd to Robert E Lee to Rabb Rd to Rae Dell on the east, Rae Dell to Barton Skyway, Barton Skyway to Lamar, Lamar to Westrock on the south to Barton Creek).

Memberships are based on households. All adults 18 years old and older living in a member household are eligible to vote. Property owners who own more than one property are eligible for a single membership and single vote.

Thanks so much for supporting BHNA this year!

Become a Friend of Barton Hills

For a mere \$20 per year, you can show your support of BHNA's programs by becoming a Friend of Barton Hills. Friends get special recognition in our newsletter and on our Website. Our special contributors help make possible our July 4th parade and celebration, our pilot luminaria project this past December which we hope to expand this year, our Greenbelt Guardian workdays, and other special projects.

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

Debby Kalk
debby@cortexlearning.com
442-8829

Neighborhood Planning Update

November House Meetings Great Fun, Big Success

A top priority for BHNA last year was to prepare for—and get out front of—the City of Austin (COA) official Neighborhood Planning process (now expected to start around June). The purpose is to define our own vision and values as an essential first step to better shape the ultimate plan. Aside from zoning and land use issues, our focus is on the concrete “Action Items,” such as sidewalks, beautification projects, that we want in the plan. For the plan is a powerful legal document where we can at least establish these priorities, independent of the current budget climate.

For Don, the highlight of these efforts and their culmination were the House Meetings in November, where small groups of eight to ten neighbors met in homes to discuss vision, values, and goals. All of this was made possible by the vision and creativity of BHNA member Dr. Patricia Wilson, a professor at Community and Regional Planning, UT Austin School of Architecture. She, with the wonderful leadership of Mark Tirpak, Teaching Assistant, and a class of intrepid graduate students, dedicated themselves to a truly unique project—helping us find our own community vision and voice through their expertise in planning, architecture, and group processes. It is an extraordinary model for the rest of Austin—and the good news is that it is still in the making. Presenters from each house meeting will discuss their findings at the February 22 BHNA meeting, and together we can discuss common values and goals. We also have some exciting activities and ideas to propose for this year. So, reserve your seat now!

The following is a brief summary of the house meetings for background for the meeting. These are excerpts from a far richer and invaluable report done by the students which is posted on the website. Please read this full report on website. It includes a fascinating *Future of Barton Hills Mind Map*.

The **Regional Water Quality Planning Project**, which is sponsored by LCRA to develop measures to protect the water quality of the Barton Springs Segment of the Edwards Aquifer and its Contributing Zone, is announcing its recommendations the day after our February 22nd BHNA meeting. This is of important concern to conservation of the Aquifer and Barton Springs, as well as development around Dripping Springs. We will provide an update on this at our meeting. But more importantly, Bill Bunch, Executive Director of Save Our Springs, is coming to our next BHNA meeting to discuss these issues as the first of a series of presentations this year in conjunction with our Neighborhood Planning process. He exemplifies a passionate and constant devotion to the natural beauty of the Springs and watershed that is uncompromising and often contentious. But I can think of no other to speak the wisdom of conserving our natural heritage for the future. Maybe this is the “undaunted courage” of our time and place. What do you think? Come and engage in this important conversation.

In addition, a “blog,” created by Glenn Chase and ineptly hosted by Don Long, will enable an ongoing, community-wide conversation.

Excerpts From Student Final Report:

Within the next few years, Barton Hills will incorporate its first neighborhood plan, as part of the city of Austin’s official neighborhood planning and zoning effort. Quite uniquely, the residents of Barton Hills will offer the city not only participation in this formal neighborhood planning endeavor, but a vision of the future of Barton Hills, based on their collective beliefs, ideas, and priorities.

This document attempts to capture a general vision for the future emerging from this process, which included a Community Workshop conducted in October and 12 house dialogues facilitated in November of last year. Approximately 120 residents participated in our process, including around 12 as interviewees, 15 as workshop participants, and 96 as participants in house dialogues. It should be noted that the dialogues involved in all seven geographic sectors of the neighborhood. (See full report on the website.)

Bill Bunch to Speak

Barton Hills Apartment Site Sediment Remediation and Water Quality Controls Plan Update

During the last several months, design has proceeded for the two proposed storm water treatment ponds (sand filters) and the sediment remediation plan at the Barton Hills site. At the neighborhood's request, the upper pond site was shifted west to move it out of the soccer practice area and make it less visible from Barton Hills Drive. Additional fieldwork and detailed topographic and tree surveys were conducted by Crespo Consulting Services, Inc., the city's contractor, to locate and protect trees in the new pond location and along the tributary. Additional sediment sampling was also conducted to refine the location for sediment/debris removal along the tributary channel. In order to maximize the water quality benefits of the project, additional surveying and evaluation was conducted to determine if storm water runoff from a part of Barton Hills Drive could be captured in the upper pond. The consultants determined that some additional currently untreated area could be captured and routed to the pond. Design of two water quality ponds, including details, storm sewer location, placement of splitter boxes and inlets, and channel re-vegetation, is currently being finalized. City staff and their consultants met with the Water Utility regarding locating the upper pond over an existing wastewater line, and they have given us permission to do so.

BHE Report Card

Happy New Year from Barton Hills Elementary!

On January 24th, Barton Hills and 41 other AISD schools were recognized by the School Board for receiving acknowledgements under the *Gold Performance Acknowledgement* (GPA) system of the Texas Education Agency. The acknowledgements recognize campuses for high performance in areas critical to the academic success of students. Barton Hills received acknowledgement for Commended Performance on all four subjects covered by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) at the elementary level—Reading, Writing, Math, and Science. We are proud of the hard work of our students, teachers, and parents!

Thank you for voting in the AISD bond election in September. Voters approved the bonds, and Barton Hills will benefit from them. While we don't have a schedule of when work will be started, we are slated to address drainage issues, the HVAC system, and safety and security.

This is a busy semester for students and staff! Some events might interest you:

- On February 8th, local authors will be visiting with our 4th–6th graders to share their experiences and tips as writers.
- The evening of March 24th will highlight our students' work in the area of Fine Arts, when our PTA is sponsoring "Arts Matter" from 7-8 pm.
- On Friday, April 1st (no foolin'!) the Barton Hills staff will take to the stage for our bi-annual Teacher "Talent" Show (the quotation marks are no mistake!). Be assured of an evening of fun and entertainment.
- Kindergarten Round-Up is just around the corner. If you will have an incoming kindergartener, please plan to join us in early May to hear a presentation by the

teachers and get a jump-start on all the paperwork. If you or know someone else would like to visit a kindergarten classroom before May, please schedule it with our office at 414-2013.

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

Kati Achterman

Take a (Side) Walk

Thank you for your interest in sidewalks. First, I think we should find agreement on what we want to do. Here's what we discussed last year:

1. Sidewalks are a safety issue. We would like to see sidewalks from Barton Hills Market all the way up to and around the Elementary School. Neighborhood beautification and traffic slowing are related issues.
2. We already have a bid from the city's 50/50 program for two homes on Barton Hills Drive. We need a plan to pay for our portion of those sidewalks. Don Long wants to have a fundraiser in February, possibly soliciting corporate sponsors. Bake sale? Other ways?
3. We'll need to contact affected homeowners.
4. We should probably send out a note on the listserv and possibly to offending homes about keeping their lawn growth off the sidewalks.
5. In the long-term, we'll need curb cuts so that the sidewalks are wheelchair/stroller accessible?

Estimate: 240 feet of concrete at Barton Hills and Dear Foot will cost us around \$2,468.

Your thoughts and feelings about these goals/ideas are much appreciated. Thanks!

Jen Stuart

Greenbelt Guardian Glee-Nings

Upcoming Work Day

On Saturday, February 12, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., we will hold our 8th trail repair work day, celebrating two full years as Greenbelt Guardians. We are getting to know our adopted greenbelt more intimately as we move through the seasons and the cycles of flood and drought.

This upcoming work day we will be focusing our attention on the **Gus Fruh Trail, at 2642 Barton Hills Drive**, repairing damage caused by the recent flood and tending to one of the commitments we made for our Austin Parks Foundation Grant ("God willing and the creek don't rise" . . . again). Our tasks will include: filling in eroded sections of the trail with granite; repairing fallen sections of stone retaining walls on the steep switchback trail; recycling downed tree limbs to use as barriers on illegal "rabbit trails"; creating improved cross-trail drainage swales to decrease future trail erosion; and collecting river boulders to rebuild the creek overlook retaining wall. We will also continue our program of invasive species removal, whittling away at the growing ligustrum and nandina population. We'll also have a native seed planting team and a trash collection team.

There are plenty of tasks with varying levels of stamina and skill required. We hope to have

another great neighborhood turn out. If you haven't yet joined us for one of these workdays, please come join us. We work hard, have a great time, and go home satisfied that we have given back to this beautiful place that gives so generously to us.

BHNA Receives Award for Greenbelt Guardian Program

At the Annual City of Austin Parks and Recreation Awards ceremony in November, the BHNA Greenbelt Guardian Program received the "Nancy Bowman Neighborhood Park Grant Award" for the city's 2003-2004 Adopt-A-Park Program. We were recognized as the most outstanding award winner of the 2003-2004 Austin Parks Foundation Grant program, for "exceeding expectations."

The award is a preserved section of Austin's cherished Treaty Oak tree, an engraved heritage piece. We will need to decide how to best share and protect this wonderful form of recognition.

To all who have supported and participated in the Greenbelt Guardian program, it is time to take a bow! This neighborhood definitely "exceeds expectations," in ways too numerous to count.

Parking Lane Committee

Parking in the Bike Lanes

The BHNA Parking Lane Committee has distributed two surveys to owners who live on the west side of Robert E. Lee Road to determine their interest in having a parking ban in the striped bike lane. The responses that have been received were all in favor of this measure. The east side of Robert E. Lee Road is the jurisdiction of the Zilker Neighborhood Association (ZNA), and their president has been apprised of our progress on this measure.

The BHNA Parking Lane Committee (PLC) has recommended that our Executive Committee vote to ban parking on the west side of Robert E. Lee

Road from Barton Hills Drive to Rabb Road.

Furthermore, they recommend that the BHNA request that the ZNA review and take a position on banning parking on the east side of Robert E. Lee Road to make the proposed change uniform on both sides of the street.

Finally, the PLC recommends that our Executive Committee request that the existing parking ban zone be extended on the east side of Barton Hills Drive to the northern terminus of Hollow Creek Drive. This would be an extension of approximately 50 yards to bring it to the same point where parking is already banned on the east side of Barton Hills Drive.

Neighborhood Watch

The #1 Crime Prevention Technique in the World

It is time once again to think about launching the Neighborhood Watch (NW). John Luther, the visionary architect of the Briargrove holiday luminaria, has volunteered to lead this effort. He has a lot of great ideas, fully in the spirit that the NW is not only about crime but also about helping our fellow neighbors. Maybe we could rename this Neighborhood Lights. His philosophy is that the vitality of a neighborhood is seen in its attention to details, e.g., keeping road signs visible, clearing overhanging tree limbs, making sidewalks passable, replacing rusted NW signs. Please come to the BHNA February 22 meeting to hear more about how to participate. The NW can be a great way to enhance and celebrate community but it depends on you to help John to make it so. We are also fortunate to have APD Officers Dawn Leonard and Mario Renteria to help us in any way with NW startup and future. So let's take advantage of this opportunity now.

Safety Tips

- Illuminate outside walls of house and keep shrubbery below window sills so others could see a burglar.
- Lock doors and windows! This is #1 way burglars enter homes.
- Re-key your house (recommended every year); this is proven to reduce burglary.
- Secure deadbolts to wood studs of door frame by using 3 inch long screws.
- Try to be more attentive to detail when noticing suspicious activity (e.g., license plate number).
- Use the code word, "Burglary in Progress," to alert dispatcher to make top priority for more immediate response.
- Always call 911 whenever it is a question of personal safety.
- Our neighborhood postal lady, Nikki, recommends that elderly residents leave emergency contact information in their mailbox so she can alert appropriate persons when concerned.

Mr. Rowland, a Barton Hills resident. He saw one of the men go to the front door of a home, then the back door, and return to the vehicle. He thought this odd, so he got in his own vehicle and followed the vehicle. He lost the vehicle for a short time but saw it again returning to the area it had just left. The driver left the area when he saw Mr. Rowland looking at him. The police were notified and the vehicle was stopped in the area. There was stolen merchandise in the vehicle from a burglary committed in the Barton Hills neighborhood. All three occupants were arrested for burglary and unlawful carrying of a weapon, which was also found in the vehicle. This is a prime example of how Neighborhood Watch Programs are effective. The sooner the police are notified with accurate descriptions and last know locations the better chance they have of apprehending the suspect/s.

SPO Dawn Leonard
SW District Representative
(512) 974-4405
dawn.leonard@ci.austin.tx.us

Officer Leonard will be at the February 22nd BHNA general meeting to update us, provide more information on Neighborhood Watch, and answer any questions. Please take advantage of this opportunity.

Lights! Camera! Action! Coming in February, 2005, a new Alamo is opening nearby. Located at 1120 South Lamar in the old Fiesta supermarket space, the Alamo South Lamar will be the newest, most modern Alamo to date. It'll featuring new stadium seating in all theaters, digital sound, a complete 3-D setup in one theater, drive-in movies in the parking lot, and more! The theater will have 6 screens, and feature new release movies as well as a sampling of the special event programming that has made the original downtown location famous. Doors open March 7, 2005, with a showcase of 8 special events. Stay tuned!

I want to note that Neighborhood Watch Programs do work. I have an example from just last month in your neighborhood. A suspicious vehicle occupied by three males was observed by

Ride the #29 Bus!

Other Neighborhood Items

Barton Skyway Mural Committee Field Trip

We had a wonderful field trip last month, visiting two stunning tile murals. To see for yourself, I urge you to visit them.

The E 11th St mural uses tile in a lively pictorial story of the neighborhood on the front. Be sure to walk behind the mural to see the dynamic assemblage on the back that incorporates shards of concrete, glass, metal, tile, and found objects that we surmise were collected from buildings that once stood in the neighborhood. It's stunning! The mural is on the southeast corner of the intersection of E 11th and Waller. It's part of a significant redevelopment effort the runs for several blocks along the street east of I-35.

We also visited the mural created with students at Brentwood Elementary. Linda Anderson, a member of our committee, is the school's art teacher who helped to develop this charming mural that incorporates ceramic pieces with some tile and marbles. Its peace theme is derived from a short verse, which is incorporated into the work. The school is just south of Justin Lane between Yates and Arroyo Seca at Brentwood. The mural is on the west side of the school building, off Yates.

We will be inviting Jean Graham, who spearheaded the Brentwood project, to meet with us. She is now working on a larger mural project with the Brentwood

neighborhood, mounted on a wall at the Crestview shopping center.

I will be checking on city permitting and authorization before our next meeting.

Thanks everyone!

Debby Kalk

Austin Neighborhoods Council Report

I want to thank the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association for allowing me to represent the community as the delegate to the Austin Neighborhood Council. It is my opinion Barton Hills is an urban secret. Thousands of people move around us every day. We are fortunate to be near a revitalized downtown and blessed to border on Zilker Park, the Barton greenbelt, and Barton Springs. This year our community and communities near ours will be working with the City of Austin to rezone our neighborhoods. I believe we have an interest in what is happening around us and what is being planned within and near our community. As delegate I plan on keeping you informed on this and other issues important to our neighborhood.

Eddie Torres

BHNA Electric Lawnmower Sharing Program

Gasoline-powered lawn/garden equipment is responsible for upwards of 10% of the total air pollution in urban areas and lawnmowers are responsible for

the majority of these emissions. These emissions contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone (smog) and can adversely affect your health. Not surprisingly, Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions, the major greenhouse gas, are spewed out in enormous quantities from gas-powered mowers as well.

Last year, through a donation, a few neighbors in Barton Hills began sharing a cordless electric lawnmower at no initial cost to them. Each homeowner has to agree to share the cost of a new battery (approximately \$120.00) and new blade (\$25.00) periodically as well as to retire their existing gas-powered mower. The mower can fully charge overnight and cut 1/3 of an acre on each charge. More neighbors could share the existing mower. For more info on how you can join the program and help improve air/water quality, please call Scott Johnson at 447-4595.

Treasurer's Report, January 2005

The state of BHNA finances is robust!

We begin this year with \$6,442 cash available in our general fund. Fully \$2,322 of this is committed to three particular projects that appear to be stalled. They are: a) Sunken Gardens Fund - \$2,200; b) Oak Wilt Donations - \$82; and c) Officer Jones Donations - \$40. We should find a way to either complete these three projects or reallocate those funds to another use.

Scott C. Smith

A New Proposal for the Future of Zilker Botanical Gardens

Recently, a proposal has been put forward by the Austin Botanical Garden Committee (ABGC) to transfer the operation of Zilker Botanical Gardens (ZBG) from the City of Austin to a new independent, non-profit foundation. The ABGC currently has as its members David and Claudette Hartman, Gayle Herring, Richard Huffman, Barry Lovelace, Dr. Carol McKenzie, Dr. Craig Nazor, George Pond, Tom Tinguely, and Clarke Straughan. We have proposed this idea in response to the budget cuts to ZBG by the Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) that have left the management of the facility inadequate to maintain the gardens in the face of increasing public use. The Austin City Council must ultimately approve this proposal; however, the ABGC would very much like to secure the support of the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association.

That ZBG is inadequately funded for a facility of its type is apparent to those of us who volunteer at the gardens. The amount of money that is spent by PAR per visitor to ZBG is currently \$0.72. This is the lowest expenditure per person of any similar facility in the State of Texas. The second lowest is Mercer Arboretum, which spends \$2.88 per visitor. For comparison, the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden spends \$14.57 per visitor, and the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center spends \$56.25 per visitor. The fact that ZBG looks as good as it does can be attributed in large part to the volunteer support of the Austin Area Garden Council (AAGC). Unfortunately, the current economic climate of Austin is making substantial volunteer effort harder and harder to come by.

The result of this low level of funding leads not only to less maintenance, but also to more vandalism to the facility due to the lack of adequate staffing. The education program is provided entirely by the AAGC, as well as most of the budget for new plants. The AAGC is struggling to meet this financial burden. Some areas of the garden are not accessible to the handicapped. Public safety is compromised.

PAR has so far charged few user fees for the public use of ZBG. Our shady parking lot is currently used by people attending Barton Springs to avoid the \$3 parking fee at the Barton Springs lot (parking at ZBG is currently free). All professional photographic use of ZBG is currently free of charge. Even in the case of weddings, which until recently cost \$35 for 2 hours, all proceeds went into the city's general fund, rendering them unavailable for use by ZBG.

Wedding rentals, a potential excellent source of revenue, have been discontinued. "Enterprise Accounts," which have been set up for years at other PAR facilities and allow money made at a facility to stay at that facility, have never been established for ZBG. In response to requests from garden volunteers that funding levels at ZBG be substantially increased, the city is currently discussing plans to establish new fees at ZBG, but it is still not clear if these fees will actually go to the gardens or to the general fund.

The ABGC proposal calls for the lease of ZBG to the nonprofit Austin Botanical Garden Foundation (ABGF). The ABGF, through the establishment of a board, would assume the responsibility to hire a director to staff and manage ZBG as a first-rate facility. The board would be able to assess and retain fees for such things as attendance, memberships, parking, weddings, and photography. The board would also raise money for capital improvements from public and private sources, most of which are currently unavailable to ZBG because such sources will not give funds to city-operated facilities.

How would this affect the Barton Hills Neighborhood Association? All visitors to ZBG would have to either pay a modest entrance fee or purchase an annual membership. This membership would allow free access and parking at ZBG. In exchange, visitors would be treated to a much-improved garden experience. There would be a full-time Director of Education and a greatly expanded education program that would be free to Austin school children. Botanical and horticultural research would become possible, as well as the propagation of endangered species of plants. Vandalism would decrease and safety would improve. Funds for new facilities, such as a Butterfly House and a new Visitor Center, would be raised. Traffic flow in and around ZBG would be improved. New parking facilities would be developed, as well as better water drainage across Stratford Drive.

The ultimate result for everyone from this proposal would be a first-class botanical garden in downtown Austin run in the same manner as other fine botanical institutions across the country. We believe that this is far preferable to the tenuous financial situation that currently threatens ZBG under PAR management. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at:

<c.nazor@earthlink.net>

Craig Nazor

Support Our BHNA Sponsors!

To place an ad, please contact Howie Richey at 444-4550 or zow@io.com

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BATHS

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.

BHNA General Meeting Agenda

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Tues., February 22, 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	Bicycle Lanes Proposal
APD Community Liaison	Electric Lawnmower Project
Zilker Gardens User Fee	ANC Details
Bill Bunch, Save Our Springs	Committee Reports:
Updates:	Greenbelt Guardian
Remediation Ponds	Sidewalks
Neighborhood Planning	Neighborhood Watch
SW Trails & Greenbelt Plan	Adjourn

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

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