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# CRESTVIEW

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

### NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 2021

## Likely Charter Amendment Vote in May to Change How Austin Is Governed

As reported in the *Austin American Statesman*, “A coalition of area political insiders aiming to make sweeping reforms to city of Austin elections – one of which would eliminate the city manager position and shift power to the mayor – say they have enough support from voters to put the proposal on the May 1 ballot.”

A group including one of Mayor Adler’s prior staff members, Jim Wick, has submitted a petition to the city clerk’s office. If the clerk’s office certifies that the petition is valid, then Austin voters will vote in May on proposed changes.

Everyone wants strong political leadership—neighborhoods, civic leaders, and the business community included. But communities also need thoughtful, dedicated council members, who work with the mayor to establish appropriate policy, and competent, professional managers to carry out those policies.

### What is a council-manager form of government?

This is the form of government Austin has been operating under. Currently, voters city-wide elect the mayor, and voters in each of 10 districts choose a councilmember from their district. The mayor and city council appoint a city manager. Under this form of government, the city manager, city council, and mayor work together to enact budgets, to draft and enforce legislation, to provide city services, and to oversee city departments and appoint departmental heads.

### What does a city manager do?

The city manager is accountable to the entire council for the satisfactory implementation of council policy and the day-to-day administration of municipal affairs freeing up the elected body to establish policy. Under council-manager government, qualifications and performance—and not skillful navigation of the political election process—are the criteria the elected body uses to select a professional manager.

The hiring process for a city manager is comparable to that of a corporate CEO. It begins with general discussions amongst city council members, often in consultation with voters and professional consultants. The pool of qualified candidates is larger since city managers traditionally are paid better

See Questions & Answers, continued on page 6

## Opinion: A ‘strong mayor’ is not the answer to Austin’s challenges

By Jesus Garza and Catherine Morse

(Editor’s note: This article is reprinted with permission from the December 20, 2020 *Austin-American Statesman*.)

Over the past two decades, Austin has emerged as a global destination for job creation while maintaining its roots as a community known for live music, art and culture. This has been accomplished under a council-manager system of government, that while imperfect, has been successful. Recently, however, a group called Austinites for Progressive Reform has called for dramatic upheaval in our city’s governance structure by proposing a change from our current council-manager governance to a system that would place more executive power in a strong mayor.

Their proposal is offered up as a panacea to fix the challenges our city faces. However, in reality, it will simply consolidate power into the hands of the political elite while limiting the agency of Austinites to participate in local government.

Our council-manager form of government divests power and provides checks and balances that safeguard all people of Austin. If voters next year approve the charter amendment for a “strong mayor,” Austin will have an elected mayor operating independent from the council with vast spending authority on personal initiatives, veto authority over council decisions and the power to dole out political favors and critical city jobs to supporters. The mayor would not even be required to attend council meetings, relegating council members to positions of old-school ward representatives — essentially silencing many voices across the city that we fought so hard for in the adoption of the 10-1 system.

Austin has had mayors who worked with the City Council, the community and the city manager to continuously improve the quality of life. To be sure, these mayors did not always get it right — none of us do during our personal or professional lives — but they got it right more often than not. Their success in the current system can be attributed to:

- Real partnership between the mayor, the City Council and the city manager



See Strong Mayor, continued on page 2

# CRESTVIEW

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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*Strong Mayor, continued from page 1*

- Encouraging transparency through robust citizen participation and open access to elected leaders and professional staff
- Vigorous debate between elected leaders as they formulate policy and approve ordinances to execute those policies
- Allowing management to execute policy direction in a professional manner without bias or political interference
- A strong and committed City Council that focuses on the needs of the city and all who live here
- Universal embrace of the concept that we are a city of ideas, and although we are not a perfect city, we can all work together and accept constructive criticism when it helps improve the city

As a result, Austin is one of the most highly regarded cities in the nation. We are ranked as the “Best Place to Live in the USA” by *U.S. News* and, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, Austin has the “Best Job Market” in the country. This recognition has not been achieved by accident. The mayors, city councils and professional city managers have worked together with all members of our community to strengthen Austin’s position as a global leader.

The council-manager form of government has proven to be the most prudent path to affect positive change. It is the best system of government to protect the people, and the city, against the potential of an out-of-control executive.

We felt it necessary to speak out because so far no one else has pushed back against the proposals. Our hope is that our community will come together to face our city’s challenges and avoid the distractions by those seeking a complete overhaul of our local governance.

*Jesus Garza served as Austin city manager from 1994-2002 and retired in 2017 as CEO of the Seton Healthcare Family. Catherine Morse is a partner at Enoch Kever PLLC and has served in numerous community organizations.*

## All CNA Memberships Are Up for Renewal for 2021

Unless, of course, you have already renewed or joined for 2021! (And a big “thank you” to those folks!)

Since the early 1980’s when the Crestview Neighborhood Association was formed, CNA has been dedicated to preserving our neighborhood as a safe, livable place for its residents. Any residents living within the boundaries of Crestview (Lamar, both sides of Justin, Burnet Road and Anderson) are eligible to join the association. Dues are \$10 per year per household (up to 4 adult members) and are paid on a calendar year basis. To join the association or to renew your dues through December 2021, use the form below. Make checks out to Crestview Neighborhood Association or CNA. Or you can use PayPal by going to <https://crestviewna.com/join/>. Any questions regarding your membership can be directed to the Treasurer at [joincrestview@gmail.com](mailto:joincrestview@gmail.com).

I rarely meddled in the cat’s personal affairs and she rarely meddled in mine. Neither of us was foolish enough to attribute human emotions to our pets. Kinky Friedman



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# Frida On My Mind

By Marilyn Querejazu

Spring is on the horizon; wildflower plantlets are greening up the neighborhood and our urban birds have started their riotous courtship routines. It's time to start planning post-vaccination art outings.

The San Antonio Botanical Gardens is creating **Frida Kahlo Oasis**, a reimagining of Casa Azul, Frida Kahlo's home, studio and sanctuary in Coyoacán, a unique neighborhood in Mexico City. The exhibition will cover 2,100 square feet in the heart of the botanical gardens. Frida's Oasis promises rich colors and vibrant vegetation from May 8 through November 2, 2021. That gives you plenty of time to map out an art and microbrewery themed outing to San Antonio.

Frida Kahlo's actual Casa Azul was made into a museum in 1958, four years after her death. Today it is one of the most popular museums in the Mexican capital and before COVID was often overrun by tourists.

In 2015 a re-creation of Casa Azul called "*Frida Kahlo: Art, Garden, Life*" constructed at the New York Botanical Garden was hugely successful. Both exhibitions serve to reframe what we know about Frida Kahlo, focusing on her connection to nature and the substance of the art she made and collected. While she is recognized worldwide as an important figure in the art world, we tend to fix on her eyebrows (interesting) and her love life (also interesting).

Did you know she painted 55 self-portraits? Well she did.

One of the most important is right here in Austin at the Harry Ransom Center (HRC). The Nickolas Muray collection of modern Mexican art includes Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940), *Still Life with Parrot and Fruit* (1951) and the drawing *Diego y Yo* (1930).

Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* is incredible and often on loan. Since 1990 the painting has been featured in exhibitions in more than 25 museums in the United States and around the world, including



*Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird* (1940) by Frida Kahlo

Australia, Canada, France, Spain, Mexico and Italy. The painting was featured at the New York Botanical Garden's exhibition in 2015. Fortunately for us it will back on display in the lobby of HRC around June 2021 as life gets back to "normal" in public spaces.

Art outings are all about discovery. But at the same time, the more you know going in, the more you get out of the experience. I suggest listening to the HRC's *Curatorial Perspectives: A look at Frida Kahlo's Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*. You will find other instructional/entertaining YouTube videos about Frida Kahlo's life and art. And there is always the Salma Hayek movie.

## Other possibilities:

**The McNay** [www.mcnayart.org](http://www.mcnayart.org)

- *Limitless! Five Women Reshape Contemporary Art* - February 25, 2021 to September 19, 2021
- *Selena Forever/Siempre Selena* - January 15, 2020 to August 1, 2021

**The San Antonio Museum of Art** [www.samuseum.org](http://www.samuseum.org)

- Latin American Popular Art Gallery (Permanent)
- *America's Impressionism: Echoes of a Revolution* - June 11-September 5, 2021

## Hospitals in need of convalescent plasma donations

We Are Blood in Central Texas is in desperate need of convalescent plasma donors as COVID-19 cases skyrocket. Spokesperson Nick Canedo says they're receiving an increasing amount of requests for plasma from area hospitals. People who have had COVID-19 or people donating blood can get tested for COVID-19 antibodies for free. The antibodies are used to treat patients in Central Texas hospitals fighting for their lives. In order to donate, donors must have either a positive COVID-19 test or a positive antibody test. Donors must also be symptom-free for at least 14 days and meet all other blood donation requirements. Blood donations can be made by appointment at any of three donor centers including the one located at 4300 N. Lamar. To make an appointment on line go to <https://weareblood.org/donate-blood/make-an-appointment/> or call (512) 206-1266. Face coverings are mandatory and appointments are required.

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# COVID-19 News

## CDC Updates

Although more COVID-19 vaccines are becoming available in our community, they are still limited, and many individuals have not been able to receive one. While there have been anecdotal stories of people being “in the right place, at the right time”, many people who have tried to schedule vaccines, that have now been opened up to 1a (persons in health care and long-term care facilities) and 1b individuals (persons over 65 or over 16 with at least one chronic medical condition, including pregnancy), are finding it difficult to locate facilities which have the vaccine available and are having a difficult time using the websites used to schedule vaccines because of technical issues and site crashing due to the large number of people trying to sign in. However, hopefully this situation will improve over the course of the next few weeks.

The CDC recommends that even persons who have already had the infection still receive the vaccination.

The vaccine does not alter your DNA. COVID-19 vaccination will help protect you by creating an immune response without having to actually experience sickness. While they may be unpleasant and may cause side effects such as fatigue, headache, fever, chills, nausea, muscle pain, and joint pain, these side effects show that the vaccine is working.

With less than 1% of the local population vaccinated, people still need to continue to take preventative measures to avoid contracting or spreading the disease. Mask wearing, social distancing, frequent hand washing, and avoiding areas where contact with others outside your home are all still appropriate. Also, it is not yet clear from the vaccine trials whether individuals who receive the vaccine can still transmit COVID-19 to others. Therefore, it is very important that even those vaccinated take the same precautions as before to ensure that they do not inadvertently spread the virus as a carrier.

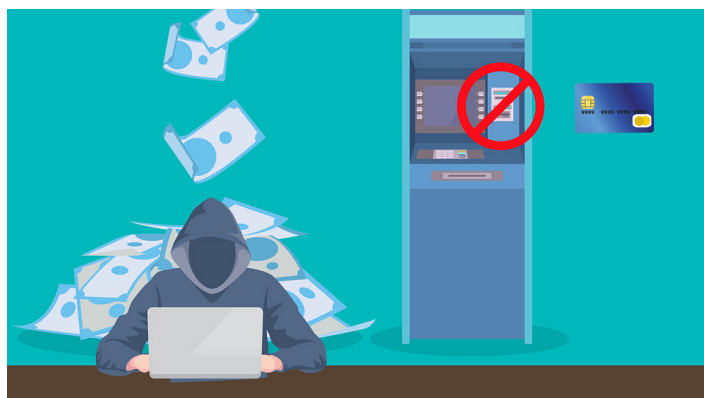
## COVID Scams

It did not take long for scammers and fraudsters to adapt their schemes to take advantage of confusion and fear during the COVID-19 pandemic. Often, their main target is seniors, but no one is immune from their machinations. Scammers may try to steal your social security number, credit card

numbers, passwords, bank account number, health plan ID numbers, Medicare number or your money.

These scams may take the shape of text messages heavily laden with the words “vaccine” and “COVID-19” from people posing as government agencies falsely advertising a COVID-19 vaccine or cure. Do not click on links in texts related to the virus! Instead, check [cdc.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) for current information.

Some scammers are attempting to sell fake vaccines claiming that the sensitive vials will be shipped on ice or can be delivered overnight for a fee. No legitimate vaccine is sold online. These fake vaccines can put lives at stake by not offering genuine protection and can cause severe negative reactions. Another scam involves requesting payment for placement on vaccine waiting lists all in an attempt to steal your money and personal information. However, just remember that government and state officials will not call you to obtain personal information in order to receive the vaccine, and you will not be solicited door to door to receive the vaccine.



Sometimes a caller may have a “free” offer such as a COVID-19 testing kit if you will just answer a few questions - which just happens to involve you giving certain personal information. A caller may claim to be a representative of your health care plan. If you’re enrolled with a national insurance company that serves a large number of members, you could be at even greater risk because phone fraud is a numbers game. Fraudsters will call hundreds or even thousands of people, pretending to represent an insurance company. If they say they’re calling from a national company, they’re more likely to reach people actually enrolled with that company. Or a caller might claim to be working for the government,

See COVID, continued on page 5





# Howdy Neighbor!

By Mike Lavigne, CNA President

If you are reading this, please consider becoming a member of the Crestview Neighborhood Association if you haven't already joined or renewed this year. It is just ten dollars a year for your household. These days, dues money is used mostly for supporting neighborhood projects like the Lil' Lane of Lights, Violet Crown Community Works, the park renovations and a handful of other cool things that help make this neighborhood unique. This newsletter is mostly a break-even enterprise. We like to keep the dues and advertising costs pretty low so that we can serve as many people as possible. That only works if enough households join up! You can join today online at [www.crestviewna.com/join](http://www.crestviewna.com/join) or use the membership form on page 2.

The two things this month that we will be paying the most attention to are the proposals being turned in to the city for the Ryan Drive tract and the zoning and neighborhood plan changes that will likely be presented to the city during the window for such asks, which is February.

I'd like to have the developers seeking a shot at building out the Ryan Drive property present their proposals to us in the first half of the month. Those proposals are due to the city on February 11th.

We do anticipate a handful of zoning and neighborhood change requests this month as well. While the Contact Team has official jurisdiction over giving the city an opinion on these changes, COVID has meant many of these discussions have been consolidated within the Neighborhood Association. Your input as a member will be greatly appreciated.

I'd also like to hear from more elected officials this year... and let them hear more from us. This will also be something we could possibly do informally online.

It is pretty easy and common for those in public office to live in a bubble during normal times. With COVID I think those bubbles have gotten pretty thick. Many of them start to believe their own talking points and think that just saying something on social media or offering thoughts and prayers is the same as action. It isn't. We have to continue to hold them accountable when it isn't election season. Especially local elected officials.

For example, Council Member Greg Casar recently took to social media to declare the removal of a safety barrier as a fix for inequality and segregation. Remind you of anyone? We have to start demanding our leaders listen and fight for us and not take a back seat and let bullies like Casar run them over.

If I sound a little frayed, it's an accurate portrayal of my

feelings right now. Thanks to the Violet Crown Clubhouse two things have happened: I've gotten to meet so many more of you than I ever did before, and I've seen first hand how our city government takes local businesses for granted. I hear and share your frustrations with our city government and their coziness with the development community. Before COVID things were good enough that these failures didn't matter as much. There was plenty to go around. But sometimes it takes a crisis for our shortcomings to see the light of day. And boy, oh boy, does our city have'em.

*COVID, continued from page 4*

saying he or she is calling from Medicare, for example, and is authorized to collect fees or penalties over the phone to set right some supposed problem with the person's Medicare account.

To help protect yourself, here are some suggestions:

- Do not give out your personal information to a caller unless you know the person on the other end or have placed a call directly to some place like your doctor's office.
- Don't be in a hurry to answer questions from a caller, especially ones that ask for personal information. Usually, the less said the better; so don't engage with the caller – just hang up.
- If you get a robocall, do not press "2" or any other number to get more information or to be removed from the call list. This is part of the scam to either connect you with a person who will pressure you for more information or to verify that there is a human on the other end of the line and to sell your number to other scammers.
- Dial toll free numbers carefully. Scammers take advantage of people who accidentally miss-dial by purchasing a number that is one digit off from the legitimate number (especially one that is easily miss-dialed). The person thinks they are talking to a call center agent for the company they were trying to reach but are actually on line with a scammer.
- Trust your gut. If it sounds too good to be true – such as free medical services or equipment in exchange for some personal information – it probably is. If any part of a conversation makes you uncomfortable, the best thing to do is to hang up and call the company or organization the person claims to be representing using the phone number on your health card or the local or toll-free number on the organization's website.

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than mayors and since candidates can be recruited from outside the city including a nationwide search. City managers provide professionally trained leadership, vision, and a focus on results. City managers have the experience necessary to manage a city's finances and budget to ensure a sound financial future for the government that in turn, ensures taxpayer dollars are being spent as intended. Strong financial management also is critical in providing city services to citizens.

Access is widened under a city manager. People can call the city manager's office for immediate help when politicians may not always be as responsive to their constituents or be able to immediately fix the problems. Council gets better cooperation and information because the city manager is their employee.

Some feel there is logic to the idea that good management is a professional skill, and not one that all politicians wield well. A mayor, while politically astute, may not always possess the necessary management training and experience.

### What would a "strong-mayor" form of government mean for Austin?

If voters approve the charter amendment for a "strong mayor," this would allow the elected mayor to have almost total administrative authority and political independence. The mayor could operate independently from the council, and he or she would not be a member of the council, and in fact, would not even have to attend council meetings. The mayor would have vast spending authority on personal initiatives, veto authority over council decisions (effectively rendering those decisions to mere recommendations) and the power to dole out political favors and critical city jobs to supporters. A "strong mayor" would have the power to appoint and dismiss staff without council approval or public input. It permits an incumbent to make decisions based largely on political con-

siderations.

Even if a strong mayor were to appoint a chief administrative officer to assist her/him with budgets and supervision and coordination with department heads, this would not be all that different than what we have now except this officer would only be accountable to the mayor and not to the entire council.

### Does a council-manager form of government work for Austin?

A council-manager form of government provides a balanced system of democracy. Elected officials hold the city manager accountable for implementing the policies and laws that are passed. This system requires elected officials to work together for the betterment of the city. Additionally, if a city manager isn't performing, they can be removed immediately, while a Mayor can only be removed every four years. The council-manager form encourages open communication between citizens and their government.

Under this form, each member of the governing body has an equal voice in policy development and administrative oversight. This gives neighborhoods and diverse groups a greater opportunity to influence policy. Under the "strong mayor" form, political power is concentrated in the mayor, which means that other members of the elected body relinquish at least some of their policy-making power and influence. This loss of decision-making power among council members can have a chilling effect on the voices of neighborhoods and city residents.

### Is a "strong mayor" form of government appropriate for Austin?

This form of government strips away powers granted to the councilmembers and places that power in the hands of one individual – the mayor. This would transfer even more power from the people of Austin into the hands of the politically

See Questions and Answers, continued on page 7



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Under the “strong mayor” form, it’s easier for special interests to use money and political power to influence a single elected official, rather than having to secure a majority of the city council’s support for their agenda.

This proposed reform is being linked to other changes such as campaign finance reform, moving election dates and ranked choice voting as cover for centralizing power in the mayor’s office to benefit Austin’s financial and political elite, the primary beneficiaries of such reform and the people with the most capacity to donate to a mayoral election.

#### Is the timing of this election appropriate?

By holding this charter election in a May election date following a presidential election, which historically has the lowest voter turnout, fewer people are likely to go to the polls.

#### Questions to ask yourself:

*Which form of city government is most accountable? Which form would be more political? Which form would be more professional? Which form is more likely to be representative of the needs of the citizens?*

## In Memoriam – Ginny Kalmbach

Ginny Kalmbach, Crestview resident and former owner of Ginny’s Little Longhorn Saloon (a tiny county church looking building on Burnet Road), passed away on December 30, 2020 at the age of 85. Ginny was known for using her venue to foster the career of many up-and-



coming country and rock stars, including Dale Watson. The impact she had on Austin’s music community is legendary.

Although she had a strong love of county music, Eddy Arnold, Hank Williams, Ray Price, and Marty Robbins being among her favorites, Ginny never meant to own a bar. However, she became honky-tonk royalty after she took over the ownership of the saloon in 1982. She started out as a waitress at Dick’s Little Longhorn Saloon. Over time she became close with the owner’s family and even took care of Dick and his wife when

they became sick with cancer. After Dick’s death she found that he had left her the bar.

She went on to introduce live county music to the bar, and regulars included Watson, Jim Stringer and



Justin Trevino and special guests included the likes of Billy Joe Shaver and Billy Dee.

Ginny was also known for launching her popular Sunday afternoon party game, Chicken Shit Bingo. Watson said she was like a “chicken whisperer”. He once said “She makes a little sound, and the chicken follows her from the pen all the way to the pool table”.

Terry Gaona, her once bartender and one of the new owners when Ginny retired in 2013, described her as a true-hearted soul with a “beautiful aura,” a lovely smile and an encyclopedic knowledge of country music.

Many will miss Ginny, an irreplaceable Austin icon.

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