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NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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APRIL 2021

How Will Austin's Proposed Charter Amendment "F" Impact Neighborhoods?

by Jeff Jack

On May 1, 2021 the City of Austin will hold a special called election to consider 7 Charter amendments and one city code amendment. Of particular interest to our neighborhoods is City Charter amendment, Proposition F. This charter amendment would change the current city government from a "Council-Manager" to a "Strong Mayor-Council" form of government. The exact wording of the ballot is:

"Shall the City Charter be amended to change the form of city government from 'council-manager' to 'strong mayor-council,' which will eliminate the position of professional city manager and designate an elected mayor as the chief administrative and executive officer of the city with veto power over all legislation which includes the budget; and with sole authority to hire and fire most department heads and direct staff; and with no articulated or stated charter authority to require the mayor to implement Council decisions."

Just reading this ballot language should send shudders down one's spine as it is clear that this is a drastic step away from a representative democracy, even though it is being proposed by a "progressive" coalition. It is even more obvious when you consider that the actual language of this charter amendment dictates that the current responsibility for the City Council to "enact legislation, adopt budgets and determine policies" will be transferred to the Mayor! Just imagine that your vote for your district City Council member no longer means anything to the day-to-day operations of our city as all authority rests entirely with the new Mayor. It is particularly important to realize that the wording "enact legislation" means that all zoning and land development rules would be at the will of the Mayor! It would be as if we were to change our governance to a Monarchy giving this King or Queen the authority to grant not only amendments to adopted neighborhood plans but also to approve individual zoning and variance cases, spend the city tax revenue on whatever they wanted and direct city staff to disregard whatever adopted Council policies were or what the community needs are. Such power would eliminate not only the city manager position but also the value of having District Council Members' appointments to the Planning Commission, Board of Adjustment, Environmental Board or even the Historic Landmark Commission!

But if you are unhappy with the current city council,



In future elections, businesses and developer interests will only have to focus on one race, the Mayor's election.

city manager, Planning Commission, Board of Adjustment or any of city departments and have the hope of electing a neighborhood friendly Mayor, think again to what this change would mean during coming elections. The interests that see our neighborhoods as gold ready for the digging will no longer have to spend money on multiple city council races to

get their agendas passed by the city. Currently it takes 6 of the 11 council members to get anything passed by the current 10-1 Council, but in future elections, business and developer interests will only have to focus on one race, the Mayor's election. Imagine if we eventually get a future City Council to adopt a revised CodeNEXT that includes effective protections for our neighborhoods, but that is then vetoed by the Mayor due to pressure from the business interests that contributed so heavily to the Mayor's election. What recourse would our neighborhoods have? Can neighborhoods afford to gamble that they can collectively balance this powerful financial juggernaut of the developers every four years? Are we willing

to risk the future of Austin's neighborhoods on that long shot? So, instead of taking that gamble, let's continue to work to elect neighborhood friendly and accountable council members to the current 10-1 City Council system. Electing council members that are more responsive to the entire community than an all-powerful Mayor beholden primarily to business interests, is

a better way to go for Austin! **Vote NO on Proposition F.**

Mr. Jack lives in the Zilker neighborhood, is past president of the Zilker Neighborhood Association and the Austin Neighborhoods Council and has served on the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment.

Early Voting

Monday, April 19, 2021 - Tuesday, April 27, 2021

Election Day

Saturday, May 1, 2021

Sample Ballot: https://countyclerk.traviscountytexas.gov/images/pdfs/sample_ballots/sample_ballot.pdf

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CNA General Meetings are held the second
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Bluetiful!

by Marilyn Querejazu

First off, in 2009 while we were worrying about swine flu and watching Mad Men, science gave us a new color. Chemists at Oregon State University (Go Beavers!) accidentally discovered a new blue pigment when students mixed yttrium, indium and manganese oxides, creating the first new blue color in more than 200 years. They named the intense blue power YInMn (YIN-min) blue.

The previous newest blue pigment was the beautiful, toxic cobalt blue, discovered in 1802. Before cobalt blue, the only blue was ultramarine, made by grinding semi-precious lapis lazuli. The name "ultramarine" means beyond the sea – because the pigment was imported from mines in Afghanistan. It was outrageously expensive.

About a decade after YIN-min blue was created, Crayola just had to have the new color, giving it the name Bluetiful. This addition came at a cost, however. To make room in the 24-count box, Dandelion, a crayon for 27 years, was retired. (An icy dwarf planet sympathizes.)

New colors have come along to enliven our world - so have new shapes. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the East India Company brought textiles to Europe with a curvy, organic shape woven into the fabric. Enter the Paisley, resembling a fat comma, a droplet, or a seedling. It was originally a Persian symbol of life and eternity, and perhaps fertility.

The Paisley did not get its modern name until luxurious Kashmir shawls woven with the design became all the rage among wealthy Europeans. The town of Paisley in Renfrewshire, Scotland created an imitation of the shawl to capitalize on the demand and from there the Paisley was on its way to timelessness.

In the 60's and 70's the Beatles, and then those "hippies" adopted the paisley, hoisting it once again into high demand. (As a nerdy high schooler, I likened them to fancy paramecium.) It is still a very popular motif in Iran and Asian countries where it is woven into silks and fine wools for weddings and other celebrations. The world of high fashion has recently seen a resurgence in Paisley laden fashions, including brands such as Saint Laurent, Burberry and Gucci.

So, what is it about the Paisley that explains its endurance? Maybe the lack of straight lines, or the organic, yet undefinable shape. Those restful loopy blobs. You tell me.



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Howdy Neighbor!

by Mike Lavigne, CNA President

Now that vaccinations are well underway and more and more folks are getting out and about, it is so nice to see some of y'all I haven't seen in months. We are almost through this thing, and if we just act responsibly a little while longer we can all get out there and have a little more fun soon.

There are a few things to address this month so I'll get right to it.

Ryan Drive (currently Austin Energy property)

It appears that there are 8 proposals in response to the City's request for proposals. Now, city staff will score them and present council with the scoring results and top recommendations. Then (probably in May sometime) Council will take it up on the dais and vote on who gets the contract.

From our surveys and conversations, it is clear that the neighborhood wants (and deserves) as much parkland/greenspace as we can squeeze out of this project. All of them will have an affordable housing component and some sort of public space and amenity. I would like for the top scoring proposals to present to our membership between now and when council votes on this.

Propositions

There are an alphabet's worth of propositions on the ballot this May and early voting may have already started by the time you get this. They run the gambit to returning the homeless camping ban to ranked voting choices, campaign finance and strong mayor. The CNA will not be taking official positions on these.

Personally, I like the Democracy Dollars one the best. It could help level the playing field for candidates who aren't real estate backed or independently wealthy. My least favorite is the strong mayor idea. I personally feel like the Mayor already gets whatever he wants. I can't imagine how much worse off we'd be if Steve Adler had been any more powerful.

Leslie Pool will address an informal CNA meeting on April 13 to discuss and answer questions about the propositions and anything else you care to ask her. Members check your email for more info on that.

Downtown Commission

In some personal news, I was recently appointed by Council Member Pool to serve on the City of Austin's Downtown Commission. This group is supposed to be the stewards of the Downtown Plan and give input for council approval on various projects (parks, growth, parking...etc).

Personally, I hope that this appointment will get me closer

to answers to questions like why increased density downtown hasn't led to increased affordability or diversity and why we aren't focusing on housing for the service industry and creatives that attract so much growth to downtown. More to come on this, but the bottom line is that I'll now answer to Commissioner or Commish if you like. Kidding, of course. I answer to Big Guy, Chief, Boss, Hey You, Lavigne and other things too blue for this space.

All kidding aside, I'll do my best to represent D7 and am grateful to Council Member Pool for her confidence.

If you have questions or concerns about the Downtown Commission, the neighborhood or life- as Eddie Wilson says, "I'll be easy to find!"

Google Fiber in the Neighborhood

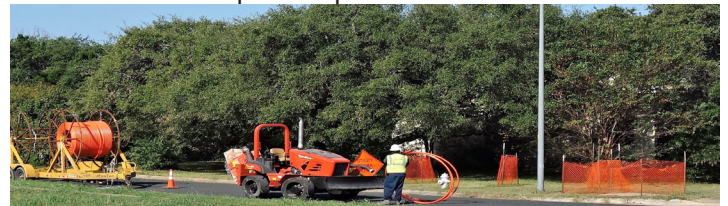
You may have noticed some increased activity in the neighborhood these days. This is because Google Fiber is in the process of installing service equipment.

This process follows this general outline:

First a crew with spray paint, lawn flags and utility maps "blue stake" the streets, driveways, sidewalks, lawns, etc. to notify following crews of existing buried infrastructure so they can avoid it. Next, excavation crews create pits for installing utility boxes of various sizes: big holes for "vaults" or in-ground boxes at major street intersections and smaller holes for small in-ground boxes called "coyotes" at the street between two houses. Street cutting crews then will use micro-trenchers to cut two-inch wide trenches across the street every few houses to run the main fiber down the street. Apparently an incredibly loud process! At this point, the vaults and coyotes will be buried and connected to the fiber optic cable. Once a customer requests service, a trench (maybe an inch or so wide) from the coyote to the house is dug, and a small box is attached to the side of the house.

This all means that for the next few months you may see workers working in various sections of the neighborhood resulting in street closures, street parking limitations, increased traffic and activity, "work area" in the right of way of yards and hearing a sizable amount of noise.

Any resident having an issue with construction should call 877-454-6959 to report the problem.



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COVID Continues - But There is Hope on the Horizon...

.... if we all continue to act responsibly.

Spring Break and relaxation of critical public health safety measures by government officials notwithstanding, the majority of thoughtful citizens and businesses seem to be continuing to listen to immunologists and other health officials and to use common sense in making choices about what activities are safe to participate in.

Increased numbers of individuals who have been vaccinated have allowed for baby-steps in the effort to return to our pre-COVID world. Vaccinated individuals have been able to safely meet with other family members and friends who are also vaccinated (even without masks!) and even with small groups of not-yet -vaccinated kith and kin who are not at a high risk to contract the virus (with a mask). Being vaccinated has also allowed people to perform necessary functions like grocery shopping with a mask with a bit more peace of mind that their risk is reduced of contracting or spreading the virus.

Unfortunately, some premature celebration may also come with increased vaccination because we are all jaded from months of restricted activity. Because we still do not know what the potential is for vaccinated individuals to spread the infection (although it is looking optimistic that it is severely reduced), because of the mutations, and because even with the vaccination there is still a small possibility of contraction the virus (although indications are that symptoms are less severe and chances of hospitalization or death are reduced), it is important to continue to be cautious, follow safety protocols and to avoid those activities still considered too risky by our health officials such as travel, congregating in medium and large groups and spending time indoors away from home. This is critical to avoiding another wave of COVID that could stress our hospitals, health care workers and result in more deaths. Let's not undo the progress we are making by jumping the gun with our activities and by being patient just a bit longer.

Do's and Don'ts of getting vaccinated: Do eat breakfast/lunch and stay hydrated the day of your shot. Don't get a shot if you currently have COVID. Afterwards, be sure to get one. Don't take over-the-counter pain relievers (ibuprofen, aspirin, antihistamines, or acetaminophen) before your vaccine to try to prevent side effects. If such side effects develop afterwards,

you are clear to go. And afterwards, do not schedule a regular mammogram for four to six weeks as it could show a false positive. And as exciting as it may be to finally receive your shot, don't post a picture of your immunization card online as it can be used to steal your identity. However, do save your card in your important medical records file as it could make life easier later on.

Other news: Primarily because of the COVID mutations, Pfizer is suggesting that a third booster shot may be necessary some time in the future or even regular boosters such as we do for the flu. Boosters may also be needed as a person's antibody levels go down and they start to get breakthrough infections. So how long are our current vaccines good for? Bottom line: we don't know for sure yet because we don't have the data, but indications right now are that it is good for at least six months. Continued study over the past months indicates that obese individuals are at risk of developing a more severe form of the COVID.

Good news and bad news department: If you have had COVID, you only need to get one shot. This is because once a person has had COVID, the person's immune system should recognize the virus if it invades again. Also, although it is unclear why, women seem to be experiencing more and worse side effects than men to the vaccine. This is actually a good thing because it means the vaccine is working. For minor side effects like a sore arm, try putting a clean, cool, wet washcloth over the area where you received your shot or trying to move your arm more. (I know; it hurts!) Or, if you have a fever, be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

In Memoriam



Bertha "Cookie" James, a founding member of the Crestview Neighborhood Association in 1982 and longtime Crestview resident, passed away on February 15, 2021. For many years, Cookie and her husband Don James Sr. owned and were the special residents of the historic McKown House, located in the heart of Crestview. As stated in her obituary, Cookie possessed a strong work ethic, and a keen business instinct. She was a gifted interior designer/decorator, and enjoyed transforming the homes of family and friends. To say that Cookie was a "big animal lover" is an understatement. She loved all animals, but held a special place in her heart for all of her toy fox terriers. She was a devoted wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, and friend. Her greatest joy was spending time with her family and friends. Cookie will be sorely missed.

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Opinion: A Strong Mayor in Austin Would Be an Obstacle to Social Justice

By Nico Ramsey and Pastor Joseph Parker

Over the past few months, a group of political insiders has advocated to change our city's form of government from a council-manager to a mayor-council, also known as "strong mayor." They have also accused the council-manager form of government of being inherently racist because racist policies were implemented under a council-manager system in Austin during the segregation era. Such a narrow understanding of racism in America fails to identify the real struggles that so many in our society face every day — especially people of color.

Even Nelson Linder, Austin NAACP president and a member of Austinites for Progressive Reform — the group working to change to a strong mayor form of government — refuted the notion that the system itself is inherently racist. Specifically, he said recently, "let's be real clear, during that point in time, Jim Crow was everywhere."

We cannot become blind to the ways in which racism can be advanced under any form of government. What we must consider is how best to address issues of racism, social injustice and equity. Systemic racism and the issues surrounding it are difficult to solve. However, social and racial equity will not be solved with a change in Austin's form of government. Blindly assuming so is an offensive suggestion for those who live the Black experience, those who have dedicated their lives to anti-racism initiatives and those whom we have lost during this fight for racial equality.

George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis; Breonna Taylor was killed in her home in Louisville; Freddie Gray died in custody in Baltimore. These were all cities with a mayor-council (strong mayor) form of government. We saw social unrest in Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, DC, all cities with mayor-council forms of government.

By design, the council-manager form under Austin's 10-1 system assures that all communities, no matter the ZIP code, have an equal voice at the table. Austin's system requires elected officials and professional administrators to work collaboratively to meet the needs of all people. It provides the greatest opportunity to discover and implement a more just and equitable democratic government. More voices at the table means a better chance at equitable city legislation.

Under a mayor-council system, Austin would be left with a mayor elected at-large with little accountability to the council or the diverse communities the council represents. Instead of

a city manager serving as the chief executive officer obligated to administer government professionally without regard to politics, we will have an elected mayor with power to deny and overturn the will of the people. Only a supermajority of council, or the electorate every four years, could overturn harmful decisions.

Austinites for Progressive Reform's tagline is "to make Austin the most pro-democracy city in the country." To tout democracy and racial justice but rush charter amendments that will overhaul our city government — to be voted on in a May election that historically has the lowest turnout in Austin, with little to no community buy-in, especially from marginalized communities — seems counterproductive to the stated goals.

These are important issues. We can make substantive change without the unnecessary distractions of political actors seeking to increase power through a change in our city charter. We need a government that works for the people, and we are committed to making certain that we remain an Austin for all people.

Ramsey is the volunteer director of community engagement for Austin For All People — a volunteer-led organization — a corporate social responsibility professional and a civil rights activist. Parker is a volunteer co-chair for Austin For All People and the senior pastor at David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. This piece first appeared in the February 28, 2021 edition of the Austin American Statesman.



Nico Ramsey



Pastor Joseph Parker

Extended Tax Filing Deadline for Texans

In the March edition of the CNA Newsletter, we told you about free tax help available from Foundation Communities. As the IRS has extended the filing deadline to June 15 for Texans to file tax returns and pay any tax due, the Prosper Tax Help Program has been extended through June 15, 2021. For full details, you can read the complete article at <https://crestviewna.com/newsletter/newsletter-archive/> or go to Foundation Communities website at <https://foundcom.org/prosper-centers/austin-tax-help/>.

Thank you, Crestview!



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3 Landscaping Trends That Are Not So Eco-Friendly

by Nancy Harris, CNA Treasurer

While it is appealing to think of a lawn that requires no water, no maintenance and no sweat and is good for the environment, this is probably more of a dream than a reality. Let's examine three popular trends in lawns and look at their pros and cons.

Synthetic Lawns or Artificial Turf - This is basically a plastic rug that you are laying on your lawn. While it doesn't need cutting and doesn't need as much water as a natural lawn, it is not as maintenance-free as some think. While it may look good when new, it will have to be raked and fluffed up periodically to keep it looking good and to add to its longevity. The spaces between the plastic blades, the fill that is usually sand or crumb rubber, will need to be kept filled and leveled. Just like any rug, it will need cleaning to remove pet and bird droppings from time to time to prevent odors and maintain sanitary conditions. In warmer climates, surface temperatures of artificial grass are about 20-50° F higher than natural grass and typically reach the same temperature as asphalt pavement – not so great if staying cool in your yard is a priority for you. Synthetic lawns add to the heat island effect and can potentially make your house hotter and increase utility bills. This is also not so great for any real plants that are nearby. High summer temperatures cause it to deteriorate more quickly. As the plastic components break down, plastics and the chemicals in them can be absorbed into the ground. Instead of increasing the life of your soil, it compacts soil and creates an uninhabitable environment for the living organisms in it. Compacting the soil contributes to flooding problems. Artificial grass is hard and can hurt if your kids fall while tumbling around with the dog.

Gravelscaping - This landscaping trend is also touted for its ability to save on water usage and reducing yard maintenance. Rocks almost never need replacement. But unlike grass, rock absorbs large amounts of heat and causes the same issues with the heat island effect mentioned above. Rocks don't aid plant growth or soil health. Rocks also cause soil compaction. Most trees prefer acidic soil, but rocks create alkaline soil, which can kill trees. Rocks also increase flooding problems. Wind will eventually blow soil between rocks, creating a spot for weeds to grow, often times resulting in the temptation to use herbicides to kill unwanted vegetation. Rocks and gravel tend to "travel" which means it can be dangerous to mow or trim close by if they get picked



up by lawn equipment and thrown into the air. They can also migrate on to sidewalks and walk ways and be a physical danger to pedestrians who can sprain an ankle or fall if they step on them.

Drought-tolerant grass - In theory, drought-tolerant grass sounds great because it means less watering is needed to keep your grass healthy. Unfortunately, much of what is sold as drought-tolerant grass is made up of invasive species of grasses that have been known to cause or exacerbate the risk of fire dangers. While they are undeniably beautiful to look at, Feather, Fountain and Pampas grasses are among the worst of them. While they outperform natives during the good times, invasives tend to dry up when the going gets tough. The multiplicity of seeds produced by these grasses make them difficult to keep from spreading. Invasives often outperform the native foliage, leaving native species of wildlife bereft of sustenance and shelter. Although they will need more maintenance, because drought-resistant grasses are living organisms, they avoid the negatives of artificial grass and rockscaping. Just be sure to do your homework before you plant to make sure you are making a good choice.

It really comes down to why we grow plants in the urban environment. Plant materials provide so much more than just aesthetic value. They help improve water and air quality, reduce temperatures, reduce storm water runoff, and provide habitats for animals, insects, bees and birds. With our increasingly built urban environment, less and less of our land is porous, allowing rainwater (and, sadly, irrigation runoff) to infiltrate into our soil, which acts as a natural filter. This means our landscapes need to act more like sponges, allowing water to move slowly over the soil and spread its benefits.

(Coming soon: Landscaping tips that are actually eco-friendly)

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Brentwood Elementary School Construction Update

As you have probably noticed if you travel down Arroyo Seco or Yates south of Justin, construction is now underway for the remodeled Brentwood Elementary. Work originally began in October 2020 after receiving the demolition permit, but it was halted at the end of November without the additional necessary permits required from the city. In early January, the general contractor, Bartlett Cocke, resumed construction once necessary permits were in place, but the delay has put the project behind schedule.

Here is some update information from AISD:

Site work is continuing, and demolition is taking place inside the 100 and 300 wings, which will be renovated and incorporated into the new design. Underground work on storm sewer, electric and communication lines is also underway. While work is taking place on site, there will be hammering, drilling and other general construction equipment noises. You may hear or feel vibrations while some equipment is being used. We understand that many neighbors are working and learning from home right now, and that construction on your neighboring school can be disruptive. We thank you again for your patience and support. You will see significant activity taking place on site. This includes increased traffic from trucks entering and exiting the primary construction area off of Yates, so use caution when walking or riding bikes near the site.

The original substantial completion date was November 2021, which would have allowed for an opening date in January 2022. Unfortunately, the delay has pushed the new substantial completion date to March 2022. To avoid disrupting students in the middle of the semester, the new school opening date is August 2022. While it is always the district's goal goal to open our modernized campuses on schedule, unfortunately

these types of delays can occur during construction projects.

There will be a virtual community meeting on **Tuesday, April 6 at 5:00 PM** to learn more about the construction at Brentwood Elementary. While the Brentwood community would prefer to meet with you in-person, given the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, this public meeting will be held virtually. For more information on how to attend, go to <https://www.brentwoodpta.com/>.

Meals on Wheels Central Texas in Need of Nearly 200 Volunteers

Meals on Wheels Central Texas is in need of nearly 200 volunteers to help with the growing need to feed hungry seniors in the Austin area. Spokesperson Mariette Hummel said right now, the organization is only doing curbside meals weekly but will eventually get back to delivering hot meals daily.

Meals on Wheels Central Texas currently has 2,826 clients, a number that has grown during the pandemic and with hunger worsening through last month's winter storms. Hummel said volunteers play a big part in every senior's week and it's about much more than just delivering food.

"It's not just senior hunger that's the issue. It's senior isolation and sometimes the volunteers that come by and drop off meals for our staff, they are the only people they see," Hummel said. "So, that is really something to keep in mind. You're not just making a difference with the meal you deliver but also a friendly chat and a smile."

Meals on Wheels is also partnering with Austin Public Health until mid-April for a mobile vaccination program.

If you are interested in volunteering or need services or know someone who does, you can go to <https://www.mealsonwheelscentraltexas.org/> for more information.



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