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## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

### NEWSLETTER

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MARCH 2021

## Fact vs. Fiction: Why Prop F Deserves a Failing Grade

By Jesus Garza and Catherine Morse

On May 1, Austin voters will have an important decision to make regarding the future of our city. Among multiple ballot initiatives is one that would shift the city from our current council-manager form of government that has helped make Austin a top place in the country to live, to one that would utilize a mayor-council – or strong mayor – form of government. This proposition, Prop F, has many intended and unintended consequences that would be harmful for our city.

Ahead of May 1, Austin For All People, a group we are proud to serve as volunteer co-chairs, is asking voters to consider the facts when making a decision on what is best for our community, economy and city.

The current council-manager form of government divests power and provides checks and balances that safeguard all people of Austin. If the charter amendment for a “strong mayor” is successful, Austin would 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 to supporters for critical city jobs. The mayor would not be required to attend council meetings, relegating councilmembers to positions of old-school ward representatives. This would essentially silence voices across the city that we fought hard for in the adoption of the 10-1 system.

Proponents for Prop F have made multiple claims that simply are not factual. This article dispels many of those untruths.

Those in favor of a strong mayor want voters to think a city manager is designed to keep voters from accessing government. This couldn't be further from reality. Residents have a direct pipeline under our current system through their councilmember and the city manager's office. City managers have the benefit of looking through a wide lens on how policies will impact an entire city rather than just a constituency that elects a strong mayor.

There is also the myth that a move to a strong mayor isn't a consolidation of power into one office. It absolutely is. This proposal would take power from both the city manager's office, which would be eliminated, and from the council, and transfer it to one person – the strong mayor.

They claim it is not easy to fire a city manager who isn't performing well. The opposite is true. The city charter clearly states that a city manager “may be removed at the will and

*See Fact vs. Fiction, continued on page 2*

## Rooting for Them: How to Care for Your Plants After the Freeze

By Nancy Harris, CNA Treasurer



After our week of freezing temperatures, for most of us surveying our yard produces a rather sad sight that set back even our native plants. However, all is not lost! Our native and

adapted trees and shrubs have a good chance of bouncing back. However, patience is key, as some plants might not show signs of new growth until May. Pruning plants immediately after our recent extraordinary storm can subject plants to further damage if there is another freeze.

Winter storms destroy plants because, when temperatures drop below freezing, the water in plant tissue turns to ice, bursting cell membranes. When temps drop as low as they did during the February storm, even native plants are at risk. This kind of extreme cold can also damage a plant's vascular system, which transports water and nutrients throughout the plant body. The damage may not show itself for weeks or even months, especially in trees. While your initial inclination may be to head outside and immediately begin trimming and pulling, in most cases, experts instead advise patience. While the tops of many plants have died back in the cold, the roots may still be viable, depending on how deeply the soil froze. You don't want to mistakenly pull out a plant that would have recovered once the weather warms.

The first step is to remove things that are black, mushy, or obviously broken. Prune the woody plants such as trees, shrubs, Salvia, rosemary and star jasmine back to healthy growth (using the “scratch test” to determine) with clean pruners as soon as possible, or remove it entirely if it cannot be salvaged. These trimmings are safe to compost. To conduct a scratch test, take your thumbnail and lightly scrape the bark off of a branch. If it is soft and green underneath, it's still alive. If it's dead, it will be brown underneath or it may be dry and brittle or soft and mushy. A pruning cut should be made 1-2 inches into the green, just ¼ inch above a node (the bumps on the stem where leaves emerge). If the internal structures were damaged, evidence of that may not show up until the hot weather arrives and trees have difficulty moving water and nutrients to where they're needed.

*See Plants, continued on page 2*

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*Fact vs. Fiction, continued from page 1*

pleasure of the council by a majority vote of the entire membership of the council.”

In the scenario under Prop F, a strong mayor would need a supermajority to overturn decisions, and he or she would only be subject to the will of the people every four years.

When labor unions and other groups, including Austin For All People, voiced opposition to Prop F, labels like “special interests” were thrown around. Labor unions are not special interest groups, and this coalition is made up of volunteer citizens concerned about the future of our city.

Finally, and importantly, there has been a charge levied that the current system of government is inherently racist because it came about during the Jim Crow era. Those making these arguments are exhibiting a narrow understanding of racism in America that fails to identify the real challenges and struggles that so many in our society face every day – especially people of color. We cannot be dependent upon the assumptions that come with these proposed changes to our city’s charter to create a more just and equitable society. We must come together as a community, city, country and people to achieve true equality. We can make substantive change without the unnecessary distractions of political actors seeking to increase power through a change in our city charter.

Austin For All People believes Prop F should be given the failing grade it deserves. To learn more, visit [austinfoforallpeople.org](http://austinfoforallpeople.org).

*Jesus Garza served as Austin City Manager from 1994-2002 and as the CEO of Seton Healthcare Family. Catherine Morse is a Member of Enoch Kever PLLC and an active member in the community. Austin For All People is a coalition of concerned citizens. It is not a political action committee and is not raising funds.*

*Plants, continued from page 1*

Citrus trees are more or less cold-tolerant depending on the variety. Most citrus trees have been grafted onto a root stock, so if your tree comes back below the graft, it won’t be the same variety as when you purchased the tree, and likely will not produce desirable fruit. These trees should be replaced.

For cacti and succulents, one can expect discoloration of pads and leaves, but don’t immediately cut it away. Feel the discolored areas, and carefully cut out any parts that feel mushy. For agaves, as long as the center most whorl is still intact, showing no signs of wrinkling and firm when squeezed, the plant can recover. Otherwise, it will need to be removed and replaced. You can also determine the health of your palm trees and Sago palms by checking the crown in the center of the plant. If the center is not rotten, cut off all leaves, have patience and it should grow back healthy.

Herbaceous plants such as plumbago, bulbines, most ferns, lamb’s ear, chives or any other plant that does not have a woody stem should be cut back to the ground. If they do not show signs of new growth by the end of May, they will probably not return.

Even during normal winters, tropical plants like bougainvillea and hibiscus tend to die back to the ground before regrowing from the roots. This year they’re either completely dead or, if they do come back, the regrowth won’t be as strong because the ground got colder, and the cold went deeper, for a longer period of time.

You can use the same rules for potted plants, but their chances of survival will not be as promising as in ground plants. If the roots froze solid, the plant may not recover.

Liquid seaweed is a great tonic for plants. It helps plants recover from a wide range of stresses, including cold damage, transplant shock, heat stress and more! Giving your plants a dose will help them bounce back sooner.

The bottom line is, with the exception of plants that are obviously black or mushy, you should delay pruning until time reveals the areas that are living and dead before cutting anything back. Not only will some plants that look dead still be alive, but Austin has had freezes as late as the end of March. Leaving dead limbs and foliage at the tops of plants will help protect the lower leaves and branches from these late freezes and from night- time radiation loss.

## COVID-19 News

According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, as new aggressive mutated strains of the virus that cause COVID-19 continue to spring up around the world, vaccines and precautions such as wearing masks and social distancing are the key to keeping the virus from further mutations. Suppressing the amount of virus that is circulating in the population can slow future mutations and give scientists a better chance of keeping ahead in developing vaccines that remain effective.

While the transmission of the virus from surfaces is not as common as we once thought, one recent study showed that the virus could live on polyester for up to 72 hours and could survive on cotton for one day.

According to a Jan. 26 study published in the journal *Physics of Fluids*, air purifiers may actually make the spread of contaminated respiratory droplets in enclosed spaces worse. The authors' found that while air purifiers do move viral particles, they do little to reduce a virus' transmissibility.

Another mistake that people could be making during COVID is wearing the wrong mask or wearing your mask improperly. Make sure the ear loops on your mask are tightened so that your mask covers your nostrils and reduces any air gaps where aerosols could get in. A vented mask does not protect others as the hole in the material may allow your respiratory droplets to escape.

Throughout the pandemic, many people have clung to the idea that you can't get COVID if you keep sufficient distance from others and don't linger too long in their company. Under the right circumstances, you could get infected much faster than many have been led to believe. The conception that you were in the clear if your contact was less than 15 minutes and at a distance of over six feet didn't come from nowhere—it was developed to help streamline contact tracing. But in

reality, viruses do not need 15 minutes to 'warm-up,' and they aren't magically rendered non-infectious over the threshold of six feet.

Studies in India and China have shown that persons who wear glasses may be two or three times less likely to catch COVID than non-spectacle wearers. This seems to be because glasses wearers are less likely to touch or rub their eyes during the day.

Taking ibuprofen or Tylenol before a COVID-19 vaccine to combat the discomfort associated with your shot may not seem like a big deal, but experts caution against doing so if you want your protection against the virus to last.

Because immune response from COVID infection is more variable, the CDC is recommending that everyone who can safely do so get the vaccine—whether they've had COVID or not. Dr. Fauci also advises that one dose is not enough to give you the best protection, with the exception of individuals who have had already had COVID and the new Johnson & Johnson vaccines. So be sure to avoid putting off your second shot or skipping it all together.

When do typical side effects show up after a COVID vaccine? Everyone is different, but there seems to be some general pattern. You are most likely to have side effects the day after the vaccination, and especially after the second dose.

Getting vaccinated does not guarantee that you will not get infected, but it does reduce the risk of serious illness to almost zero. While you are protected from the disease, you are not necessarily protected from the infection. This is why even if you get the vaccine it is still important to wear a mask in public. Although a couple of recent studies have been promising, at this point we don't know for sure if getting a COVID vaccine will prevent you from spreading the COVID virus to others. One study indicated that vaccinated individuals carry a lower viral load that might make them less likely to transmit COVID.



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# Howdy Neighbor!

By Mike Lavigne, CNA President

This dispatch comes to you from the porch of the Violet Crown Clubhouse where it's a breezy 73 degrees and sunny, and my phone just informed that the water is fine. A few days ago, things were very different.

As usual, neighbors stepped up and pitched in where our government failed. I'm always grateful to live in this neighborhood. Sure, in the good times there's no place I'd rather be. But it's the hard times that strengthen those emotional ties that bind us together and make me proud of my home.

Many of us helped neighbors shut off water valves when that unmistakable thrush of rushing water was heard over the still silence we woke up to those mornings. We lent rides in our Subarus over the ice to get supplies, assistance and vaccines. We cooked and delivered hot meals to those without. We gladly gave space in our homes for those without power or water. We checked on those we knew needed checking on. We remained calm and resourceful to set an example for a generation for whom extreme circumstances will be a more regular occurrence than it has been for us.

One revelation for many of us who participated in larger scale volunteer efforts was how unprepared our city and state are for disasters and hard times. Luckily, entities like HEB, independent restaurants and networks of non profits stepped in and created infrastructure overnight. These were imperfect patches to dire circumstances, but we should be thankful we had them.

I hope that our city government can spend some effort focusing on our infrastructure. The past several years most of their bandwidth has been spent arguing ways to appease a land rush and spur unbridled growth without much thought to the consequences of straining an antiquated system with so

many people and so much concrete. If this had been a storm and flood, we'd be in pretty dire straits still. Flooding is likely going to be our "big one", and we should be making and adhering to policies that deal with that reality, not looking for ways to skirt them.

I'm proud of our neighborhood. Our community spirit doesn't just live in beer fests and festivals in the park. It is even stronger when the sun isn't out.

## 7113 Burnet Road

Remember when I said a few months ago we cut a pretty decent deal for the circumstances with the prospective buyer for this property (where the Kolache Shop and Local Post live), and then the seller halted the sale and it all went away? Well, it's back. The property has sold and the new buyer is flipping it to a developer who has come offering the deal we left off with.

The zoning and Flum change process will extend over the next month or so. We will have more info soon. Public meetings are challenging right now, but feel free to reach out and we will include you on communications. Signing up online for the CNA is the best way to ensure you get heard.

## Free Income Tax Help Available

Foundation Communities will be providing free tax help for low-income families and individuals in Austin through April and from June through October.

You can file online by going to <https://www.getyourrefund.org/en>, answering the questions and uploading your tax documents. The IRS-certified team of tax preparers will take it from there and will contact you throughout the process for any further information needed.

Or for taxpayers who cannot access our online service, you can schedule a curbside appointment at 5900 Airport Blvd. on Mondays - Saturdays (There are a limited number of

See Income Tax, continued on page 5

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## Station 16 Firefighters Happy to be Back Home

To our Crestview Community,

After a long year in the trailer on Ryan Drive, we are happy to be back in the newly renovated Station 16! Your station was built in 1957 and has been proudly serving the neighborhood for more than 60 years. However, the recent renovation was an invigoration of fresh air into this historic firehouse! Careful consideration was given to maintaining the integrity and charm of the structure while improving both the living spaces and the engine bay. As you might imagine, fire trucks today are a lot different than they were six decades ago, so the bay is now larger to fit the brand new Engine 16 we recently received. The old second bay has been replaced with an office and dedicated gym space, while the kitchen and living room are now a sleek, open-concept design that makes the station feel twice as big. The old single bunk room has been split into four bedrooms, allowing for both beds and desks in the space if you need an isolated place to study for that all-important promotional test. A mural is planned for our large brick wall, and we've begun the process of getting our small garden back into shape.

The excitement of being home on Reese Lane and surrounded once again by our neighbors has been wonderful, as you have been so quick to welcome us back with warm wishes and baskets of treats. We're constantly thankful for the Crestview hospitality, and we look forward to the time (hopefully very soon!) when we can return it and give personal tours of your new station!

Now, we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we didn't take the opportunity to end this letter with some fire safety tips! We always recommend checking the batteries in your smoke alarms twice a year; we do ours after changing our clocks for Daylight Saving Time. Also, be sure to change the batteries

whenever you hear that intermittent chirping and check the expiration date on the device itself, as they should be replaced after 10 years. If you need help with any of this—or if you or someone you know needs smoke alarms installed—you can call (512) 974-0299, and our Community Outreach staff will be able to schedule that for you FOR FREE! Fire prevention is always the first line of defense!

Sincerely,

The Firefighters of Station 16



*Income Tax, continued from page 4*

appointments available.) Documents will be scanned and an intake interview completed. Staff will then call you when your tax return is ready to schedule a follow-up appointment for tax return signature and pickup. You will stay in your car for the duration of your appointment.

The service is free for individuals who make less than \$50,000 annually and families of 2 – 4 people that make less than \$75,000 annually. The annual income limit increases by \$5,000 for each additional dependent of 5 or more.

For additional information, visit [www.comunitytaxcenters.org](http://www.comunitytaxcenters.org) or call 211.



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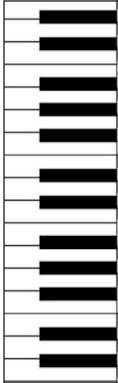
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