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OCTOBER 2022

City Council Vote on the Statesman PUD Reset for November 3rd

By Save Our Springs (SOS) Alliance

On Thursday, October 13th, City Council again postponed action on the Statesman PUD mega-development on Lady Bird Lake zoning case to Thursday, November 3rd. Please mark your calendar and plan to join us for an afternoon and evening of citizen action at City Hall.

The Austin Council is finally getting the word that there are serious problems with the proposal to upzone the 18-acre former newspaper site from a maximum of 660,000 sq. feet to 3.6 million sq. feet of six downtown-scale towers for office, condos, hotel and commercial.

Council heard an earful from citizens from across Austin opposed to the dozens of variances and tens of millions of taxpayer subsidies baked into the complicated, 50 pages of ordinance text, exhibits, and incorporated staff memos. Thank you to everyone who spoke to council and/or called or emailed your objections to the PUD plan.

To be clear, SOS and most others do not oppose the major increase in urban density for the site. We object to the gutting



of standard city ordinances in favor of a special deal for the billionaire owner developers. These gutted standards protect Lady Bird Lake, require dedication of park land and park fees (because of the increased demand for parks from the 1400 residential units plus commercial) and that the park be actual public park owned and managed for the public benefit and not as a private outdoor commercial area.

These standard ordinances that would be set aside also require payment of other standard fees to help taxpayers cover
See PUD continued on page 3

Inspired Halloween Display: Cemetery of Old Austin

A Crestview resident's inspired Halloween display caught the attention of both the TV and print media. KXAN and the *Austin American Statesman* both covered the bittersweet display created by Nancy Friedel and Ginger Bloomer on West St. Johns.

Paying homage to dozens of institutions that once helped Austin claim its weirdness, decorative Halloween headstones placed throughout the yard showcase several beloved establishments that died off through years of development and growth in the city. The tombstones list old haunts, bygone clubs, restaurants from yesteryear, bakeries, costume shops and even local personalities that have departed over the years, leaving only stories and memories for those who lived in a pre-boom Austin. The graveyard is guarded by skeletons rocking tie-dye, a feather boa and a "vote" t-shirt, and there's even a beer-drinking cowboy skeleton. Neighbors and mourners are able to read through the displays and reflect on forgotten gems while visiting the graveyard.

"We decided to make a cemetery of places that we used to go to, that we remember, that a lot of Austinites can relate to," Friedel said in the article. "And it was really just to kind of



open up conversations with the community and get people to connect." Part of the conversation Friedel and Bloomer hoped to instigate — many stories from those who have a connection to "Old Austin" — involve people and places still without headstones in their cemetery. So, in response to the cemetery's popularity, visitors were able and encouraged to leave placards of their own with memories from establishments that have gone by the wayside. "I have some wood cards, and people can write their own places that they remember and hang them on it," Friedel said.

R.I.P., Old Austin.

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NEWSLETTER

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CNA General Meetings are held the second
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Brentwood Elementary School “Flying Together” Mosaic Mural

by Pam Johns

In 2003, Brentwood neighbor and artist Jean Graham, working with Brentwood art teacher Linda Anderson and the students and staff at the school, created the beautiful tile mosaic mural which graced the west side of the school for almost 20 years. The quote “I will write peace on your wings and you will fly all over the world.” is from Sadako Sasaki. She was 2 years old when the atomic bomb hit her hometown, Hiroshima. While hospitalized with leukemia she learned the legend of the 1,000 paper cranes and attempted to fold 1,000 origami cranes before her death. She completed over 600 and her friends completed the 1,000, which were buried with Sadako. The mural was dedicated “to the diverse students and birds who pass through here, demonstrating that together we are greater than the sum of our parts.”

In 2019 the school community faced losing this beautiful mural when the school was partially demolished for the construction project. Neighbor Ralph Castillo and Jean Graham were able to cut it into sections which neighbors stored until the mural was installed inside the new school building.

The Brentwood PTA is selling color prints of the mural, signed by Jean Graham, to raise money for its programs. Prints are \$15 and can be pre-ordered through November 15, 2022, ready for pickup or delivery late November. You can order at <https://www.brentwoodpta.com/store>.



“Work is hard. Distractions are plentiful. And time is short.” - Adam Hochschild

“There are some things which cannot be learned quickly, and time, which is all we have, must be paid heavily for their acquiring. They are the very simplest things and, because it takes a man’s life to know them, the little new that each man gets from life is very costly and the only heritage he has to leave.” - Ernest Hemingway

“The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.” - Paul Ehrlich



More Brentwood Elementary News

Grand Opening Ceremony

A special ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held on Tuesday, November 1 from 5:00 - 7:30 PM at the school to officially celebrate the grand opening of the modernized Brentwood Elementary. This is an opportunity for the general community to tour the building.

The event will begin in the cafeteria with performances by Brentwood students and remarks from Principal Saenz-Hosack and district leadership.

After the ceremony, students, family and community members are invited to the PTA’s Annual Picnic to enjoy food, games and outdoor activities. Free food will be provided to the first 100 guests. We encourage guests to pack their own picnic and bring a blanket to sit on the lawn.

Crossing Guards Needed – Help Students Get To School Safely

Brentwood Elementary School is one of many schools that need crossing guards. The work is part-time and pays \$15/hour or can be on a volunteer basis. For more information, go to: AustinTexas.gov/Crossing-Guards or call 512-974-9181.



the added burdens to our streets, utilities, and permitting costs caused by the project. They also require developers to dedicate a small portion of their development to affordable housing and pay for their own parking and internal streets. Yet the Statesman PUD owners are demanding that us taxpayers cover these standard costs for them. If approved, the Statesman PUD would set a dangerous precedent that threatens all of Lady Bird Lake, all of our parks, and all of our ordinances that make developers pay for their share of the costs of growth.

It's hard to overstate the scale and number of attacks on City standards – and on common sense, decency, and the English language—loaded throughout the complicated draft ordinance.

Please stay engaged and send your comments to city council or join us at City Hall on Thursday November 3rd.

(Editor's note: For more information on what speakers have said about the PUD, links to the proposed ordinance and a list of SOS's worst issues with the PUD ordinance, visit <https://www.sosalliance.org/news/statesman-pud-reset-again-for-nov-3>).

Art Out and About - MuseoBenini

By Nancy Harris, CNA Treasurer

Now that the temperatures have moderated, you might find yourself hankering for a nice country drive to enjoy the central Texas fall. Why not head out Marble Falls way and visit MuseoBenini. There you can visit the outdoor Sculpture Trail admiring contemporary sculptures by sculptors from around the world. Or, you might enjoy walking through the 6,500 feet of indoor space contained in two galleries displaying selections from a lifetime of painting by Benini himself.

More than 60 years ago as teenager, Benini began supporting himself by painting landscapes around his hometown of Imola in northern Italy. After a stint in the Italian army and as a sailor, Benini spent 14 years painting in the Bahamas, followed by time in Gainesville, Florida where he met his wife Lorraine, a journalist looking for an interview. It was there that he began painting his signature, giant acrylic roses. In 1988, he moved to Hot Springs, Arkansas where he again became a leader in the artistic community. (It was there that I met him for the first time, and wow, what a story teller!)

He later bought a ranch in Johnson City where he had his first sculpture trail and Texas gallery. He has now moved to Marble Falls where he has "retired." The new museum was established in 2015 to showcase the evolution of Benini's paintings and three-dimensional works since the 1960's.

I hope you get to meet him. It's worth the trip!

Located at 3440 East FM 2147 in Marble Falls. Open Saturdays 10 - 6, other days by appointment. 830-693-2147 <https://www.museobeninicom/>



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Austinites May See Their Electric Bills Increase Nearly \$400 Annually

(Editor's note: In a recent Statesman article, columnist Ryan Autullo explained the circumstances leading up to the surge in electric bills.)

Already about to get hit with higher monthly fees, the typical Austin Energy residential customer will soon pay an additional \$15 per month for the next three years as the electric utility looks to recover \$104 million in payments it made last year.

The factors that led to the \$104 million in pass-through charges are largely beyond Austin Energy's control, the utility says. The price of natural gas increased, driven in part by the war in Ukraine, and the unusually hot summer demanded higher-than-usual energy consumption. Also, the February 2021 winter storm led to expensive regulatory changes to the state's electrical grid. And one final factor: The \$69 million that Austin Energy made during the winter storm, by continuing to generate power when other utilities in the state could not, is all gone after the utility passed it along to customers last year through reduced costs.

The City Council considered two options for collecting the \$104 million. The first was to recover it over one year, an option recommended by Austin Energy, but that would have created a more immediate burden to ratepayers. Instead, at their October 13 meeting, the council elected to spread the charges over three years, which, compared with the first option, decreases a monthly bill for the typical customer by \$5. A typical customer, defined as using a system average of 860 kilowatt hours, will pay an additional \$180 annually. These changes go into effect Nov. 1.

After the October 13 vote, the City Council now faces another important decision that will affect Austin Energy customers. Separate from the \$104 million under collection

is an ongoing rate case that, by itself, was already going to lead to higher bills. Under the utility's recommendation, the typical homeowner would pay an additional \$184 a year, an 18% increase. If approved, combined with the pass-through fees approved on October 13, the typical customer will pay an additional \$364 annually, or a little more than \$30 per month extra. Last month, Austin Energy said it needed to recover an estimated \$796 million in costs. Included in that was the \$104 million undercount from last year.

The council signaled a desire for Austin Energy to more frequently adjust bills based on fluctuating power supply. That won't prevent the need for future recovery payments, but it could give customers more notice of a significant change in their bill.

Little Known Electric Bill Break For Seniors 65 or Older

One of the charges on your electric bill is for Austin's Transportation User Fee, currently \$14.96 per month. Austin Energy customers 65 years old or older are exempt from the fee, but the exemption is not automatic – you must tell the city that you want to be exempt. If you don't currently have the exemption, obtaining it might soften the blow of upcoming bill increases.

Back in 2016, the City Council considered making the exemption automatic but decided not to do so because they thought some people wanted to pay the fee. During the upcoming fiscal year, the city expects to collect over \$57 million from the transportation user fee from residents. It is not clear how many residents over 65 currently pay the fee and don't know they are eligible for an exemption.

If you're 65 or older, you can apply for the exemption at: <https://www.austintexas.gov/page/transportation-user-fee-exemption-request-residential-customers-only>. Please allow up to 3 billing cycles for the exemption to appear on your utility bill. If you have questions or need assistance, call 512-974-7696 or email TUFexemptions@austintexas.gov.

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Safety First

by Cathy Zwernemann

Last month a friend riding a bike and an acquaintance walking around her neighborhood were both hit by cars. One of them died from their injuries, and the other faces months of rehabilitation from a back fracture. I don't include these facts to scare you, but to impress upon you the need to be alert while walking, biking, and driving on the streets.



With that in mind, let's review some safety tips:

- When WALKING/JOGGING on the street, always do so on the LEFT side of the street. Here is why this is important – you can SEE the driver coming toward you! If the driver is not giving you enough space you will have the opportunity to jump onto the curb and out of the street. If the vehicles are coming from behind you, you might not even know they are there – especially if you are wearing ear buds! (By the way, this means that your dog should walk on your left-hand side.)
- When BIKING on a street that has no designated bike lane, ride on the RIGHT side of the street. Use hand signals when turning, and constantly scan your surroundings for vehicles. Please don't wear ear buds! You won't be able to hear vehicles approaching from behind you.
- DRIVERS – Be ever watchful for walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Be careful when overtaking bikers, and check your rearview and side mirrors before making right turns.

As our neighborhood becomes denser, it can be frustrating as WE (walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and drivers) struggle to share the road. Let's all take a deep breath and remember that we are all responsible for each other's safety.

In Memoriam

Marion (Stephenson) Prellop passed away peacefully in her sleep on October 6, 2022, after living with dementia for the past five years.



She was born August 9, 1930. After WW II, the family moved to Austin where she met her future husband, Herbert Prellop, at Grace Lutheran Church.

She spent the next 20 years raising four headstrong children, yet she never forgot Mark Stephen Prellop - the child she lost to birth defects shortly after his birth. Once her kids graduated from High School, Marion fulfilled a lifelong desire by enrolling in and graduating from the University of Texas. When she retired from her career in Interior Design, she became a professional certified florist and started a floral shop in the family business, Crestview Minimax IGA. After her husband died in 1991, she took a more active role in the business. Everyone was greeted with her smile as they entered "Minimax."

Marion loved her family, her pets, ballroom dancing, dinners and traveling with her Mom and her dear friends, the Stuemke and Labor families. She was able to share her faith with many during her years facilitating Redeemer small groups and leading Bible Study Fellowship discussion groups.





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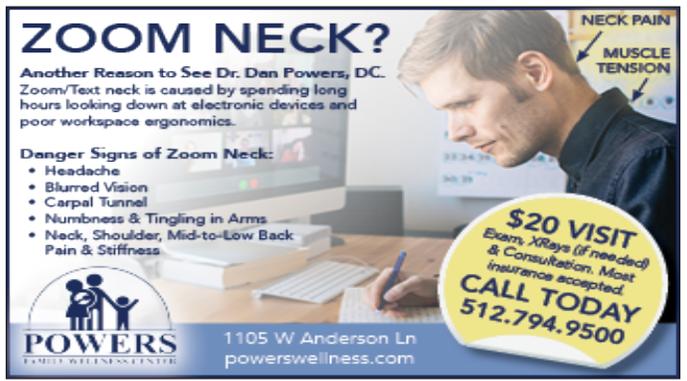
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