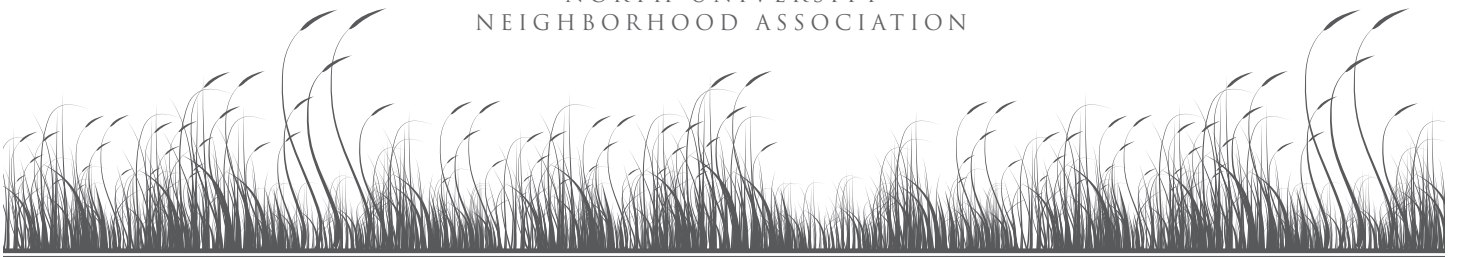


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One Night in the Neighborhood

By *Steven Tomlinson*

It was an autumn evening, much like this one, in a neighborhood much like ours in the little town where I grew up. I had just turned twelve and my little brother and I were improvising some game on the kitchen floor while Mom did dishes and Dad read the paper.

Then suddenly: BOOM!

The walls shook, the windows flexed, and we were up and outside as porch lights flipped on up and down our dead-end street.

“What was that?” a neighbor called out.

“It came from over there,” another one pointed in the direction of the explosion, and we all poured into the street and began walking together, the crowd swelling as we headed up the block and around the corner onto Oklahoma Avenue and we stopped in the middle of the street on the rim of a smoky crater. The house at 1924, the home of Mrs. Florence Zurmerly, was gone.

Now Mrs. Zurmerly was not a particularly friendly person. She never spoke, never smiled, never offered to help — just sat on her front porch with a bullwhip guarding the figurines in her rock garden. Her daughter Helen lived next door to us, and Mrs. Z had been visiting Helen that evening, and as they walked up the street and the crowd parted to let the old lady in, to see what had happened, as we watched tears form on her stony cheeks, I’m sure some of the neighbors felt like she’d got what she deserved.

“Mamma, it must have been the gas,” said Helen.

And we all waited a moment, like someone might say something else.



Photo of the Month

Luminarios on Christmas Eve, by Rusty Jackson

Then they went back to Helen’s house, and we all went home.

A few nights later I noticed the Steeds sitting on Helen’s porch with Helen and her mother.

NEXT NUNA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

First English Lutheran Church

Monday, December 2, 2013
6:30 pm

AGENDA

I. Call to Order Approve Minutes

II. Guests:

1. Discussion. Chris Herrington.
Watershed Protection Department,
City of Austin. Austin's Creek Project.

III. Reports:

Treasurer - Jan Moyle

Quadrant Leaders' Reports -

Dick Holland, Mary Ingle, Rick Iverson
and Laurie Marchant

IV. New Business:

Discuss. New development project.
501 and 503 W. 30th St (Steven Tomlinson)

Discuss. Parks plan and timeline. (Bill Bednar and
Laurence Miller)

V. Old Business:

Update on Spider House/Juiceland parking request
(Steven Tomlinson)

Update on 10:1 City Council districts

VI. Adjourn

Mrs. Z was holding something in her hand, and Helen was explaining: "Yes, It's Mamma's alright. It belonged to her mother. She wore that earring at her wedding."

"Bobby found it in the yard," said Mr. Steed.

Helen stroked her mother's hair as the old lady held the shiny thing to her ear.

The next night the Floyd's brought over a little metal train engine. "It was lying in the alley."

"Daddy got that for us at the Grand Canyon," I heard Helen say as she cupped her mother's hand around the toy. "That's what I remember most about my Daddy. Stories from the Grand Canyon."

The next night more people, more things. More stories.

And I would sleep with my window open, even though it was November, because I wanted to hear what Helen said and what the neighbors said, the sounds of people making meaning together.

Soon after, I was walking along the railroad tracks in the ravine behind our house, when I found a singed photograph, a pretty young woman in clothes from another time, standing on a stone staircase.

That night I slipped up onto the porch and stood behind the chair where Mrs. Z was rocking and handed Helen the photo. "Look, Mamma," she said, "Stillwater."

The old woman took the photo, looked at it for a long time as Helen stoked her hair: "She wanted to go to college. She would have been a doctor."

And the old woman turned and fixed me with her blue eyes and said: "Thank you for bringing it back." I was looking at a woman whose secrets had been violently broadcast to the world. And she said, "You can't know how much love there is around you until you need it all."

After that we all paid a bit more attention to what was shining in the grass or blowing down the street.

In this Issue

By Clayton Maxwell

Big thank you to all of our contributors for this last and extra juicy issue of 2013, with a particular thanks to Steven Tomlinson who wrote the wonderful opening essay about the importance of neighborhood. There are days when I feel like

old Mrs. Z with her bullwhip, and more than once I need reminding on the importance of paying attention to what's shining in the grass or blowing down the street.

In this issue, your neighbors share their insights, news, and penchant for macaroons. Regular writer for The Dish column, Beth Goulart Monson, takes us on a gluten free tour of Wildwood Bakery (p. 3), Kimberly Renner and Julie Willis talk about changes afoot for The Renner Project and the Christmas luminaries that once cast their magic glow in Hemphill Park (p. 5), and Mary Gay Maxwell gives us the dirty low down on bacteria in our creek (p. 9). See Rusty Jackson's amazing image of the Renner's luminarios in action, too (p. 6) I am happy to announce the new "Artist in Residence" column started by Bob Atchinson, this month profiling artistic luminary Chris Humphrey who has an upcoming holiday play at Scottish Rite Theater (p. 10). Douglas Plummer catches us up with the next stage of Sparky Park growth (p. 13), and we hear about the play that will be staged at Sparky this month by upstart Gale Theater Company (p. 6). Mary Gay Maxwell spells it out for us about what's going on with 10-1 redistricting, and although the new map will likely be a done deal by the time this newsletter comes out, it's important for us to know how this affects all of us and how many central Austin neighbors have fought to get a map that supports the interests of our neighborhood (Thanks Mary Ingle and Mary Gay!). And finally, I'm very grateful to Scott Morris for his first installment in a very informative series about light rail in Austin. So much good info! Read on!

Thank you readers. If you have something to say about all of this, **email me at: nunanews@gmail.com**.

The Dish

By Beth Goulart Monson

My favorite thing about the gluten-free movement is the coconut macaroons. They are the token gluten-free dessert at many a church supper and wedding buffet these days, and this pleases me. Finally, I have my answer to the troubling question: Dry, mass-produced cookie or soulless brownie, the one that is no longer crisp on the outside and chewy in the middle, but mortar-like throughout? Now I choose a macaroon, a single

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bite of meltingly sweet coconut that doesn't dirty my fingers or leave chocolate crumbs on my shirt. When made properly, the coconut in a macaroon is bound by sweetened condensed milk, not flour. No flour means no gluten. Thank you, gluten-free dieters.

And thank you, Wild Wood Bakehouse, for your excellent coconut macaroon (\$3.50). This version is uncharacteristically huge. And uncharacteristically enrobed in deeply dark chocolate. Neither of those are bad things, though I do recommend a fork because this macaroon is a crumbly mess. It's totally worth it. The filling is mostly coconut, and a far fresher version of coconut than your standard Baker's fare. And though it's sweet, the flavor of the coconut dominates as it should.

But back to the restaurant. Wild Wood Bakehouse opened where El Greco used to be, on 31st street just west of Guadalupe. Although the new occupants haven't noticeably changed the footprint of the space, the menacing echo of Gordon Ramsay's voice seems to have died down since his storming of the place for an episode of "Kitchen Nightmares." Wild Wood offers daily table service for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, plus a brunch buffet on Sundays. The menu offerings – typical Austin-eclectic fare (chicken-fried steak, hummus, tacos, etc.) are all gluten-free, and many are vegetarian or vegan. Visitors can also purchase baked goods, including loaves of gluten-free bread and vegan, gluten-free cupcakes, at the counter. Or they can slide over to the coffee bar for organic Texas Coffee Trader espresso drinks.

I've sampled only the bakery offerings so far, and I've been reminded of a lesson I learned long ago: Choose what a restaurant does best. Years ago, a date of mine ordered the London broil at a Middle Eastern restaurant. Surprise, surprise, it was disappointing. So if you follow a gluten-free diet, go wild for once – there's no gluten in the whole store. But if you're a wheat-eating cupcake aficionado, the cupcakes here might disappoint you, their texture and flavor being slightly different than the norm. Better to choose a traditionally gluten-free star like the macaroon.

Another excellent choice: the ding dong (\$3.00). Disclosure: I've never had the Hostess version. So I can't tell you how

Join the Discussion!

Listserves are a great way to become more connected with your community. **The North University Yahoo Group** is a hands-on, public communications resource, helping neighbors inform, communicate, and build a stronger community. The list is inclusive, open to anyone who lives in the North University Neighborhood and to people who have a material interest here, such as operators of a business, non-profit, or civic process. One can subscribe by sending E-mail to: **nuna-residents-subscribe@yahoogroups.com** or by visiting the Yahoo! Groups site at: **groups.yahoo.com/group/nuna-residents**



 **@crimeatx** is a crime watch Twitter feed that promotes crime prevention and public safety awareness in our area. It was established by the Central Austin CDC in January 2012 to help inform and prepare the returning student community in the immediate aftermath of the NYE attacks and murder of Esme Barrera. To sign up or learn more, visit twitter.com/crimeatx and tweet with the hashtag **#NORTHUNIVERSITY**.

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it compares. What I can tell you is this: The Wild Wood version is a joy. A crème-filled, chocolate-covered, sugar addict's joy. Two rich chocolate cakes sandwich a sugary crème filling that reminds me of the inside of an Oreo (which, inexplicably, my parents bought, while deeming Hostess cakes "junk"), except that it's AN INCH THICK. Then, the whole thing is glazed in a chocolate coating. It's dreamy.

Finally, a note on macaroons and macarons: The coconut macaroon is an entity entirely distinct from the oft-misspelled French macaron, which also happens to be trending heavily these days. The French version, made from almond flower and, coincidentally, gluten-free in its traditional form, is a sandwich cookie you're likely to find in flavors like salted caramel and lavender, colored in corresponding pastel shades. If you've found one in the NUNA neighborhood, do be a dear and drop me a tip at nunadish@gmail.com.

Bon appetit, y'all.

Neighbor to Neighbor

Knee-deep in the next evolution of The Renner Project – a mixed retail and single-family residential building at 31st & Lamar -- home-builder and designer Kimberly Renner talks with neighbor Julie Willis about favorite memories of living in North University and what she's up to now.

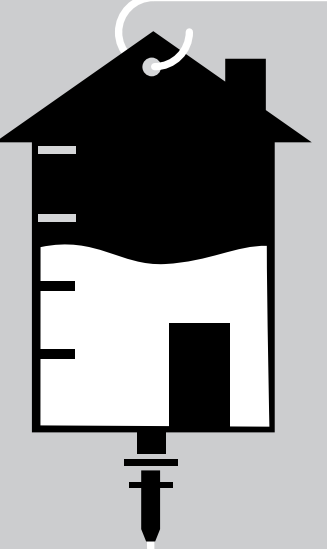
Julie Willis: How long have you lived in the neighborhood?

Kimberly Renner: We lived in the neighborhood for more than 8 years.

JW: What initially drew you to live here?

KR: We loved the sense of community nestled in an urban setting; that's unique. Plus, I have a passion for the restoration of older homes, and this neighborhood is full of inspiration.

JW: You have beautifully renovated -- or done the interior design -- on numerous homes in Hemphill Park, including 3115 and 3117 on Hemphill and 102, 200 and 210 on W 33rd. Do you have a favorite?



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KR: Each one presented its own challenges and rewards, but 3117 Hemphill stands out foremost in my mind. The property was so densely overgrown with bamboo that we found a makeshift campsite behind the garage that clearly no one knew about. The house was a duplex covered in asbestos shingle, a real eyesore. It was exciting to bring that house back to life as a single family home and re-integrate it with the neighborhood.

JW: Tell us about the next phase of The Renner Project; what are you up to?

KR: I am transitioning from my small home-based operation to something larger. I have always loved sourcing – finding, salvaging, designing or building – the right pieces to define an interior space. The Renner Project at 31st & Lamar will be a store that feels like a workshop, where people can bring their design challenges and we will help solve them with a dynamic mix of products and ideas.



Luminarios on Christmas Eve, by Rusty Jackson

JW: The first floor of the new building will be your commercial space, and your family will live on the second floor. What's that going to be like?

KR: Well, we've never had an elevator before, so that will be interesting. But, seriously, for a working parent, I think it will be great to be able to toggle back and forth easily between my two worlds, as I've always been fortunate to be able to do.

JW: When will you be open?

KR: We are under construction now, with the aim of moving our family and opening the store in the front half of 2014.

JW: That means you and your family will be leaving the neighborhood soon. What will you miss?

KR: We have so many special memories of this neighborhood. One of my favorites is of decorating Hemphill Park with luminarios for Christmas.

JW: Could you please tell me a little about that? For example, how did you get that idea and who helped you make it happen?

KR: It actually wasn't our idea; it came from Steven and Jill Wilkinson. We expanded on their idea and asked people in the neighborhood to join in every Christmas Eve. It was

a huge team effort—people just showed up to help. We formed an assembly line along the park and made the luminarios from paper bags, several hundred pounds of sand and hundreds of candles. Kids would fill the bags with sand and distribute them around the park in their wagons and adults would light them. It was a nice way to get people together, and we kept it going for several years.

JW: Were you pleased with the results? We are including one of Rusty Jackson's photos in this issue of the newsletter, and they truly transform Hemphill Park into pretty field of lights.

KR: It was a beautiful tradition. Hopefully someone will be inspired to start it up again

Theater at Sparky!

Coming to the Sparky Park Substation this December, FLORENCE, a new theatrical production from the Gale Theatre Company! FLORENCE tells the story of Florence Lawrence, America's "First Movie Star." Through dance, video, and physical theater, Florence explores fame, old hollywood, and what it means to truly be remembered. Expect to see song, dance, shakespeare, kanye west, exhaustion, chaos, glamor, mess, comedy, and much much more.

Trained in physical theatre and dance, Director, Katherine Wilkinson and Choreographer, Celina Chapin (Gale Theatre's co-founders) have brought the rigor of their training to the Gale Theatre Co rehearsal room. The actors have spent months strengthening their bodies and sharpening their physical instincts to bring Florence to life. The show is site-specific, meaning it was uniquely crafted to fit the Sparky Park space.

Gale Theatre Co is dedicated to making work that is aesthetically arresting, emotionally compelling, physically daring, and dedicated to the unending power of live performance.

Gale is ecstatic to bring their performance to the NUNA community and hopes many of you will come out and join in the fun.



Florence runs December 7th-9th & 12th-15th at 8pm. Tickets are \$20 regular admission, \$10 for 25 & under. FYI the performance will be heated! This show is rated PG-13 so please leave the little ones at home.

For More Information about tickets or the Gale Theatre Co, please email galetheatrecompany@gmail.com, visit www.galetheatre.tumblr.com or call 610-574-9052.

If you are interested in supporting Gale Theatre Co's inaugural season, please visit our Indiegogo campaign to watch a video all about our work. <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/gale-theatre-company-s-first-season>

IMPROVING AUSTIN STREAMS

By Mary Gay Maxwell

Waller Creek, our neighborhood creek in Hemphill Park, is one of four Austin streams, identified by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, to have bacterial levels that exceed the state standards for what is safe for recreation.

The City of Austin is working to solve this problem through a Coordination Committee representing a number of governmental agencies and citizens from the areas affected by the problem. This is a planning group to focus attention on the problem, but they need all of the citizens living along the four creeks to be involved in solving the problem and lowering the bacterial levels. The five categories for solution identified by the committee are:

- Riparian Zone Restoration
- Wastewater Infrastructure
- Domestic Pet Waste
- Resident Outreach

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- Stormwater Treatment

Chris Herrington, PE, from the Watershed Protection Department, is leading the effort by the City of Austin to solve the bacterial problem. He will come to our next neighborhood meeting to talk with us about how we can help to clean up our portion of Waller Creek. He will describe the steps in each category that can contribute to the improvement of the water quality in our creek.

Please plan to come to the next NUNA meeting in December to discuss this important topic with Chris. Our neighborhood volunteers who clean up the park periodically already contribute to the improvement of our creek. The information that Chris will share with us can help us to improve the water quality so that all of our children who play in the creek can be safe.

Artists in Residence:
Get to Know Chris Humphrey

By Bob Atkinson

Chris Humphrey is a composer, musician and actor who has lived with her partner Ben Johnston and assorted cats on Laurel Lane since 1998. In this first installment of "Artist in Residence," Bob Atkinson's new newsletter series highlighting the many talents of NUNA neighbors, we get to know Chris's diverse artistic achievements; from her role in the movie Bernie to her B Iden Payne awards to aerial dance and bassoon playing, Chris has done it all. She will be performing her annual Christmas/Solstice play, Wassail!, at Scottish Rite Theater on December 15th.

After earning a degree in English literature at The University of Texas at Austin, Chris moved to Houston where she studied music theory and composition at The University of Houston and at Houston Baptist University. She served as organist and choir mistress at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in

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Houston and as music director for Houston based Mahaniam Liturgical Dance Company for a number of years.

Family matters demanded her attention for a while, dictating a move to Austin. When faced with leaving her piano in Houston, she assumed she had retired from music. Her artistic inclinations became more directed toward photography and dancing.

After she and Ben performed in a couple of dance theater pieces (Susan Marshall's Spectators at an Event and David Rousseve's Love Songs), they had the opportunity to dance tango in Rick Linklater's experimental animated film Waking Life. The acting bug bit, and though she resisted it for as long as she could, she finally attended her very first acting class on September 10, 2001. The date, as it turns out, was significant.

The very next day, terror struck as the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were hit by hijacked planes. The questions started coming hard and fast -- is this acting class frivolous, meaningless, a waste of time? Or is it important? Really important? 9/11 made it very clear to Chris that life was uncertain and came without guarantees. If she was going to live the artistic life she'd always claimed she wanted, she needed to take responsibility for making it happen. It was important.



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Really important.

Since then, she has been active in the film and theater communities in Austin: writing soundtracks and plays; acting both in film and on stage; designing sound, costumes, and puppets; playing the bassoon and recorders in a baroque/renaissance ensemble and clarinet and didgeridoo in a world music band; teaching music classes; and generally saying yes to any new project that offers artistic growth.

In 2005 and 2006 she and Ben toured with Asleep at the Wheel as part of the original cast of A Ride with Bob: from Austin to Tulsa, where she played multiple roles and danced to some great Texas swing music. Also in 2006 she wrote the music and directed Steve Barney's original musical Puppet Government, a favorite at the New York International Fringe Festival.

In 2011 she was honored with two B Iden Payne Awards: Outstanding Featured Actress in a Comedy (MilkMilkLemonade) and Outstanding Music Director (The Elementals: AIR). She was also nominated for Outstanding Original Score that year (The Elementals: AIR).

You may have seen the movie Bernie starring Jack Black and Shirley McLaine. You can see Chris in the film as the Chamber of Commerce lady. Spending the afternoon across the table from Jack Black remains one of the most fun experiences Chris has ever had. Ever. Bernie is available on Netflix, so if you haven't seen it yet, check it out.

This year she has been nominated for a B Iden Payne Award for Outstanding Featured Actress in a Comedy (Brides of the Moon) and co-nominated for Outstanding Original Score for her work on Elementals: EARTH. (You can hear one of her pieces from that show at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqrdmZZDZds>).

Her next theatrical gig will also be at the Scottish Rite – The Second Shepherd's Play, a medieval mystery play, which opens on December 5. The language has been updated to make it more audience friendly, but the humor needed no revision. And on December 15, she will be performing in the annual Christmas/Solstice event Wassail! Having outgrown the chapel

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at Sri Atmananda and the Spider House Ballroom, Wassail, a family-friendly charity event that recreates the village holiday celebrations in rural England, will be performed this year at the Scottish Rite Theater. There will be live music, poetry, mummies, dancers, a storyteller, a magician, and, of course, the traditional English apple howling. Please check the Scottish Rite Theater's website for show times and ticket information for these three events. <http://scottishritetheater.org>.


At the end of this month, Chris, a grandmother of six, will begin learning a new skill set -- aerial arts. This is in preparation for her appearance in Sky Candy's adaptation of Italo Calvino's Cosmicomix at the Rollins Theater at the Long Center in June.

And, of course, in between theater gigs, there's the music. She will be performing a reprise of The Elementals: AIR at the Vortex Repertory Theatre's 25th anniversary party on January 10 and 11, and then traveling to Harlingen, TX to play renaissance music for two nights at a madrigal dinner. Once in a while you can catch Chris sitting in on didgeridoo with her son's Blues Band, Old Gray Mule, or on clarinet (or didgeridoo or drum or vocals) with The Annoying Instruments Orchestra, a world music band.

**Sparky Park Building Renovation Moving
to Next Phase**
by Douglas Plummer

NUNA and Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) are excited to announce that Phase Two of the Sparky Park Substation building renovation project has commenced. Phase One involved the neighborhood in several design meetings with PAR and architectural consultants, and ended with

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the creation of a preliminary design for the building which was presented to the NUNA General Membership.

Last week HUO Architects with Lead Architect Tom Hatch received a "Notice to Proceed" with Phase Two from PARD, and are now developing the detailed design and construction drawings that PARD will use to financially scope the project and for PARD's construction process. The current schedule calls for the construction drawings to be completed by the end of January, 2014. Sparky Park committee members will be given an "early preview" of the construction drawings in December with an opportunity to provide feedback at that point in the process.

The Neighborhood has also been meeting with PARD representatives to develop a more collaborative process for the care and watering of newly planted trees on the park grounds following the loss of two new large shade trees that had been planted during the development of the grounds. A failure in one of the sensors of the irrigation system this summer shut off the irrigation during the hot season.

Additional NUNA neighbors have been joining the Sparky Park team, so if you would like to be more involved in the process, or if you have any questions about Sparky Park please reach out to Sparky Park Committee Co-Chairs, Mary Ingle or Douglas Plummer.

Redistricting Process for Austin City Council

By Mary Gay Maxwell

History and Background

On November 6, 2012, the citizens of Austin voted to establish 10 single-member districts and one mayoral at-large position. Since then, the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (ICRC) has been chosen and is developing a map of the City of Austin divided into 10 districts.

In an attempt to have some voice in the process, a group of citizens from central Austin neighborhoods was formed. The group adopted the name "Compact Districts Coalition"(CDC) and set about to draw a map that would provide fair repre-

sentation of the central city neighborhoods. The first draft map from the ICRC had well-drawn minority representation districts (1-4), but districts 5,7, and 9 did not provide good representation of our neighborhoods.

For this reason, a resolution was drawn up by the CDC to circulate among our neighborhoods, which states our preference for a more balanced map. Several members of the group constructed a map utilizing computer-generated numbers in precincts and general population distribution. The result was more balanced and fair to neighborhoods than the ICRC first draft map.

Since then, several public meetings have resulted in changes to the original map improving the balance for our central city neighborhoods. It is still a work in progress and changes can be effected in part by good representation of our neighborhoods at the public meetings.

CDC Resolution

The following resolution was circulated among our neighborhoods in order to give individual neighborhoods a voice in the process. The NUNA Executive Committee voted to support the resolution on November 2, 2013. It is being presented at our meeting for a vote by the neighborhood association general membership to support the work of the CDC. The Resolution is as follows:

WHEREAS, because 60% of Austin's population is north of the river and 40% south of the river, six of Austin's 10 single member districts should be located mostly north of the river and four of those 10 should be located mostly south of the river; and

WHEREAS, there is enough flexibility to comply both with the Voting Rights Act and with the provision of the City Charter approved by voters regarding compactness, preserving communities of interests, and effective and fair representation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the North University Neighborhood Association, which includes 4,791 persons, supports the Compact Districts Coalition map proposed to the ICRC on 10/19/13 over the ICRC preliminary map proposed on 9/28/13, and requests the ICRC to draw 10

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districts along lines substantially similar to those in the Compact Districts Coalition map.

Final Outcome

By the time the NUNA meeting occurs, it is assumed that the ICRC will have adopted the final version of the map unless there is a legal challenge to the final map or unless the ICRC has been unable to successfully complete the map. It is unfortunate that the process moved as rapidly as it has because NUNA has not had enough time to provide input into the representation of our neighborhood's interests. This is also true of many of our central city neighbors.

A Turning Point in Light Rail

by Scott Morris

This is the first half of a two-part series on the role of Light Rail in our city.

Congestion's Impact on Life

With its explosive growth of people and cultural vitality, Austin provides nearly endless choices for things to do. At the same time, there are more constraints placed on how to get there. Congestion, parking limitations, and unpredictable travel times make trip planning an unpleasant part of our busy urban lives. And, people who live in or near the center of the city are the lucky ones. For those who live outside Austin's core, the task is far more onerous. Every day, cars and buses carrying over 200,000 people clog Austin's streets to get to

Central Austin's employment centers. People can spend over an hour and a half in their cars just to get to work and back, and many have given up making discretionary trips to downtown. In the future, Austin will have a new transportation choice. We may be able to vote next November on one solution, a light rail plan that is being developed right now.

What is Project Connect?

Project Connect is a broad regional planning initiative under the aegis of the Capitol Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO). It is currently conducting a Central Corridor study of our area to plan

light rail. That study is defined in an interlocal agreement that was created in April 2013 between the City of Austin, Capital Metro, and Lone Star Rail District. Kyle Keahey, of the firm HNTB, was hired as the urban rail planning lead for the Central Corridor. This process re-start began as a fresh look; all options and all alignments were on the table. Ten areas, or sub-corridors, of the city were defined and are under evaluation, including Guadalupe-North Lamar and Mueller. On November 15th, Mr. Keahey's group will narrow the choice of sub-corridors, recommending which part of the city will be prioritized to receive light rail. That recommendation will go to advisory boards, then to city council, and the boards of Capitol Metro and Lone Star Rail this winter for approval. A referendum may be offered to the voters in November 2014.

Light Rail's Effect On Congestion and Land Use Plans

On a weekday morning in the future, a 2-car train may pull into a downtown station with several hundred passengers. If all of those passengers were instead drivers in single passenger vehicles, they would form a line of cars 2 miles long. Instead, with 5-7 minute headways, a light rail system can bring thousands of workers each hour into Central Austin employment centers without their cars. It can also bring thousands to attend downtown festivals over the weekend, and send full trains into the entertainment districts every night of the year, returning people safely to their home communities.

Future development can occur without the enormous and expensive parking garages that add as much as 40% to the

costs of new construction. Parking pressure on residential areas near the line will be reduced. In the years following the 2000 referendum, many neighborhoods participated in light rail workshops during the drafting of the Central Austin Combined Neighborhood Plan, the Crestview-Wooten Combined Neighborhood Plan, and the Brentwood-Highland Combined Neighborhood Plan. These were detailed rail plans for Guadalupe Street and North Lamar Blvd. and included station locations. Residents from these communities agreed to those plans' density increases but these areas did not receive the needed transportation infrastructure to support those new populations.

What is Light Rail?

The American Public Transportation Association defines light rail as, "An electric railway with a 'light volume' traffic capacity compared to heavy rail. Light rail may use shared or exclusive rights-of-way, high or low platform loading and multi-car trains or single cars." The vehicle's size is smaller than a typical rapid transit subway car, but larger than a streetcar. Light rail typically has a low floor, enabling boarding at curb level. Light rail cars can accommodate over 200 people and cars can be strung together increase capacity as needed. Unlike its smaller cousin the streetcar, light rail uses discrete stations that are generally no farther apart than 1/2 mile, but can be much closer to serve dense areas like UT and the Central Business District. It can run in its own dedicated lane, be dual track, single track, interlaced track, but also has the ability to share street lanes with cars in places where that is needed. System control within a street grid is achieved with traffic lights. With station stops the average speed of a light rail vehicle in the system can be 25-30 mph.

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How is It Powered?

Light rail is electrically powered from overhead wire. This reduces the environmental impact, the carbon footprint, and exposure to the cost volatility of fossil fuels. Newer vehicles have energy recovering systems as vehicles brake, similar to those of hybrid cars. Electrically powered transportation will have a distinct environmental advantage by leveraging the benefits of Austin Energy's shift to solar and wind powered grid. Peak oil occurred several years ago. Planning to move the population on electric power allows us to get by with fewer cars, becoming a social, economic, environmental imperative.

What Are The Capital Costs?

The system costs to install light rail at ground level run average \$35 million per mile nationally, but may be higher in portions for Austin's dense urban core. Austin will not have to foot the bill alone. The Federal Transit Authority offers a New Starts federal funding grant program that matches local contributions on a 1-to-1 basis. The local portion could come from any combination of a bond referendum, donated right of way land, or funds accrued from value capture for commercial property around stations. Any system proposal must be rated based on a number of FTA criteria. 50% of all evaluative criteria are comprised of the soundness of the financial plan and includes passing a local referendum for the proposal. Retiring the bond debt is accelerated by the increased economic activity and productivity gains the system enables. The economic activity of a healthy core is taxed at the cash register and will help fund the city's unrelated operations. In this regard, even people who never ride the system benefit from it.

What Are The Operational Costs?

Today, the operational cost for electric light rail is around \$0.69 per passenger mile, where rubber tired systems like are currently on the order of \$0.89 ppm. The savings are made up from lower energy costs, lower labor costs, longer vehicle life, and much simpler and more durable propulsion system on the train. The higher the ridership of a light rail system, the greater percentage of its operational cost will be covered at the fare-box. Maximizing ridership allows the users of the system, not the taxpayers, to support it financially.

For the next newsletter: "A Brief Political History of Rail"



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