

NORTH UNIVERSITY NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Bill Bednar
June 2009

Many of you are aware that we have a controversial application for a demolition permit in Aldridge Place. The property is 408 West 32nd, a 2-story house built in the 1920's. The owners are Steve and Jill Wilkinson, who earned the gratitude of all of us last fall when they purchased that house to save it from an absentee investor who wanted to convert it, inappropriately and illegally, into a crowded "stealth dorm" for students. Now, after unsuccessfully showing the property to prospective buyers and obtaining a preliminary engineering report, the Wilkinsons are convinced that the house has foundation and other problems that cannot be remediated except at unacceptable cost. They want to demolish it and build a new home, perhaps combining it with the house and lot at 406 West 32nd, which they also own.

There are many points of view. One is that the house should be preserved and restored unless the owner can show, with more evidence than has yet emerged, that restoration is impossible or the cost is absolutely prohibitive, with the burden of proof being on the owner. At the other end of the spectrum, some might believe the owner's property rights trump everything, and that the neighborhood ought to mind its own business. There are other views tending one way or another in between. Several nearby residents think the existing evidence is conclusively in favor of demolition, and the Wilkinson's ought not to be put to any further delay or expense. Another view is that the house is one of a dwindling stock of "contributing structures" for historical district purposes, and should be saved if there is a feasible way to do it. Some think

NOTICE: Next Neighborhood Meeting

**Monday, June 1, 2009, 7 P.M.
First English Lutheran Church
30th and Whitis Streets**

the place is an eyesore and that anything the Wilkinsons would build would be better for the neighborhood. Others believe, after looking at the house, that the drastic measures necessary to save it would, ironically, leave nothing of any historical interest behind. Still others think the NPT ought not to take a position for lack of a consistent neighborhood policy on demolition applications. All of these views have rational underpinnings, and they pull in different directions.

The situation is complicated by a recommendation from the City staff for historical designation of the property, a process that may draw out another month or more, and creates an issue separate from demolition to be considered, argued, and decided, also with many competing points of view.

This case has been to the NPT twice with inconclusive results, as reported by Scott Morris elsewhere in this issue. Entwined with that is the growing belief by many participants that the NPT by-laws are too complicated, legalistic, and time-consuming, and that a simpler, more neighborhood-friendly process is needed. (On that score, please be patient. We've heard you, and relief is on the way.)

But to return to the house on West 32nd, I would like to offer some comment on the larger context of what is happening there. Lyndon Johnson once said that it's not hard to do the right thing—what's hard is figuring out what the right thing to do is. NUNA is blessed with many bright,

articulate, energetic, and committed people who are willing to work for the good of the neighborhood. With that much talent, opinions about the “right” thing to do are bound to vary, but we have processes in place for voices to be heard and opinions expressed. Every one of those voices is welcome and helpful. We are engaged in democratic self-government at its most local, elemental level, and we deal with things that hit us, literally, “where we live.” That’s why they can

Special Thanks

To Jeremy Benedik for all his help on layout and design for the Newsletter. It is appreciated.

-It's a family affair.

sometimes be so hard.

The process, though improvable,

will always be messy and imperfect. But it is what we have, and the alternatives—autocracy, chaos, or simple inaction—are worse. When we do neighborhood work, we leave our private lives and enter into public life, which needs some protocols. Let’s observe them. Attack the issue, not the person. Stick to the matter at hand. Respect and obey the rules. If you offend, apologize. If you get offended, abandon your grudge. (You may need the offender or grudgee the next time around, and there will always be a next time around.) Accept that you will win some and lose some. (Most legislators think they’ve hung the moon if they bat .150.) Most of all recognize that, in our public life, we are

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all in service of something that is greater than any of us as individuals—our ethos of preserving and enhancing the finest place to live in Austin, Texas.

No matter how individual cases turn out, let’s be on good enough terms to continue protecting and preserving the uniqueness of our neighborhood. At the end of the day, we are and remain good neighbors. That is a precious rarity in urban life! Let’s be grateful for it, and keep working with one another.

Peace,
Bill Bednar

Improve the Newsletter!

Send your thoughts, comments, ideas for the Newsletter to:

Robert Morris or Kathryn Kotrla at:

kjkotrla@gmail.com.

All input welcome!

Come Join the Parade!

The 6th Annual NUNA 4th of July Carnival and Bike Parade
 Parade starts at 10AM with the Carnival to follow. Meet at "the bench", 32nd and Hemphill Park.

This Neighborhood celebration is free and open to everyone. Children of all ages are encouraged to decorate their stroller, wagon, scooter or bike to march in our parade, lead by our local Fire truck from Station #3. After a stroll around the park, it's back the bench for refreshments and carnival games complete with prizes. Bring



a chair and stay a while. It's a great way to meet your neighbors, old and new.

This event is an all volunteer effort. Here's a list of some of the things you can do to make this the best NUNA 4th of July event yet.

-Bring a carnival game with you to set up (soccer,

basketball, ring toss and the like).

-Man one of the carnival games. We have several from years past that need a body or two to run.

-Donate "prizes" for our carnival such as new or old toys and stuffed animals. No candy please.

-Donate coffee, lemonade, watermelon, tacos or baked goods to share with your neighbors.

-Donate reusable/recyclable cups.

-Bring folding chairs or tables for setting up the refreshments.



2009-2010 NUNA OFFICERS

President	Bill Bednar wcbednar@bednarlaw.com	494-1177
Vice President	Scott Morris encode@austin.rr.com	371-7961
Secretary	Douglas Plummer douglas_plummer@hotmail.com	789-6466
Treasurer	Jan Moyle jmoyle@austin.rr.com	496-9304
NW Quadrant Representative	Janet Adams jartdaht@austin.rr.com	
SW Quadrant Representative	Kimberly and Dan Renner krenner@austin.rr.com	
NE Quadrant Representative	Carol Journeay caroljourneay@yahoo.com	478-8614
SE Quadrant Representative	Carol Fredricks	422-2230
Austin Neighborhoods Council Representative	Bill Bednar wcbednar@bednarlaw.com	494-1177
Neighborhood Planning Team (NPT) Chair	Scott Morris encode@austin.rr.com	371-7961
Webmaster	Will Donovan will@willdonovan.com	
Internet Server Host	Pallas Art Web Design	
Parking Permist (Area 1)	Chris Dial chrisdial@austin.rr.com	472-0173
Newsletter Editor	Robert Morris/Kathryn Kotrla kjkotrla@gmail.com	524-0690

Newsletter Distribution:

Bill Bednar, Roger Binkley, Jack Brannon, Pat Campbell, Don Carnes, Rick Iverson, Carole LeClair, Susan Morgan, Lyle Morris, Scott Morris, Jan & Jim Moyle, Marianne Mulrey, Maria Orozova, Homer Parsegian, Doug Plummer, Kimberly Renner, Michael Riley, Debi Rivier-Harris, Joe Sosa and Scott Thomas.

Please contact Carole LeClair
 (email: caleclair@gmail.com or 479-6151) to help or for more information.



NUNA HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMITTEE FORMED

By Bill Bednar

At its last meeting, the NUNA Executive Committee authorized Bill Bednar to chair a steering committee of volunteers to explore the formation of a NUNA Local Historic District. Many residents have expressed an interest in this idea as a potential way to maintain the neighborhood's current land use pattern, while acknowledging the thorny issues involved in trying to preserve a neighborhood while respecting the rights of the property owners within it. Nonetheless, let's give it a try. Come join the NUNA Historic District Committee!

Requirements for a Local Historic District (LHD)

Local historic districts are currently thriving in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and other Texas cities. In 2006, the Austin City Council passed an ordinance allowing for the establishment of local historic districts. Unlike some, Austin's ordinance bristles with technical requirements. But the most important features for establishing a LHD are as follows.

1. Within the proposed boundaries of the LHD, at least 51% of the principal structures must be "contributing." A contributing structure:

- (a) is at least 50 years old;
- (b) was built within a defined "period of interest"; and
- (c) has not been radically altered from its original design.

2. Owners of at least 60% of the land area in the proposed LHD must sign a petition of support. (Signers do not have to own contributing structures.)

3. The application must contain an inventory of the principal structures in the area and an evaluation of whether they are "contributing," along with occupancy and ownership histories of 25% or more of

the contributing structures at five year intervals.

Benefits of a Local Historic District

- Local districts protect the investments of owners and residents. Buyers know that the aspects that make a particular area attractive will be protected over a period of time. Real estate agents in many cities use historic district status as a marketing tool to sell properties.
- Local districts encourage better design. There is a greater sense of relatedness, more innovative use of materials, and greater public appeal within historic districts than in areas without historic designations. LHD's can encourage better quality design in new or remodeled structures, which must be in keeping with design standards set by the LHD.
- Local districts help the environment. Historic district revitalization can, and should, be part of a comprehensive environmental policy.
- The educational benefits of creating local districts are the same as those derived from any historic preservation effort. Historic districts establish a tangible link to a city's past, providing added meaning for both its past and its current population. Districts help explain the development of a place, the source of its inspiration and technological advances. They are a record of our communities and of ourselves.
- A local district can result in a positive economic impact. A historic district that is aesthetically cohesive and well promoted can create greater public awareness of the special character of Austin, provide greater diversity of structures in the urban environment, and become an important attraction outside the community itself.
- The protection of local historic districts can enhance business recruitment potential. Companies continually re-locate to communities that offer their workers a higher quality of life, which is greatly enhanced by successful local preservation programs and stable historic districts.
- HDs can provide social and psychological benefits. The comfort found in human scale environments, the pleasure of living and working in attractive surroundings, the safety gained by maintaining recognizable and walkable neighborhoods, and the beneficial effects of community-based group action. These are all direct results of most local historic district efforts.
- There are property tax incentives for



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rehabilitation of contributing structures. Moreover, structures located in historic districts may have additional safeguards from demolition or relocation, and they tend to appreciate in value.

Restrictions of a Local Historic District

One of the most daunting tasks of the NUNA Historic District Committee will be to develop and attempt to achieve neighborhood consensus on design criteria. The neighborhood defines its own criteria to be applied within the LHD. These can be as strict or lenient as the neighborhood wants, so long as they promote the long-term stability and integrity of structures within the neighborhood. These criteria become part of the city's zoning code and are therefore binding in the same way as other zoning requirements. For example, the neighborhood might consider requirements like the following:

- The density and value of new structures/remodeling should be compatible with existing structures in the neighborhood.
- The height of new structures/remodeling should not be higher than the current structure or than the homes immediately surrounding.
- New provision for parking should be as concealed as possible from street view.
- New garages/car ports should be set back from the front facade of the home.
- Appearance and landscaping should be compatible with the existing character of the neighborhood.
- The foot print and massing of new structures should be compatible with surrounding homes.

The above are by way of example only. I want to emphasize that no decisions about design criteria have yet been made or proposed.

What You Can Do:

At this point, the NUNA Historic District Committee is simply trying to acquaint the neighborhood with the requirements, benefits, and restrictions involved in

creating a local historic district. We encourage you to support this effort. Please consider:

- (1) Joining the committee! See contact information below.
- (2) Participate in the discussion. Meetings of the committee will be well publicized, and you are welcome to attend.
- (3) Make your approval or disapproval known. One of our next steps will be to devise a method for polling the neighborhood to determine the extent of support for a local historic district. Please respond when this comes your way.

JOIN NUNA NOW!

Among the many things that NUNA does, we represent the neighborhood in regards to neighborhood planning issues, we apply for grants and coordinate efforts to make sure that our neighborhood parks are kept up, and we actively protect the interests of owners and residents against those whose actions might lower the quality of life or destroy the historic character of the neighborhood. Although we are an all volunteer organization, it takes funds to do things like printing our neighborhood newsletter and sometimes (unfortunately) hiring professionals to represent our neighborhood. That is where your membership comes. Would you take a moment to join NUNA? Your annual membership dues are only:

- \$10 for each Adult in your Family

We, of course, would be grateful if you could make a contribution in excess of our minimal dues. Members who contribute \$200 or more will be recognized at the first NUNA meeting after the donation and in our monthly Newsletter on our "NUNA Heroes" list.

If you can join at our regular member level, please keep in mind that there are many other ways that you can contribute to NUNA, too. We have a variety of committees that need volunteer help that can range from occasional/minimal time commitments to monthly/ongoing engagements. Call or e-mail any of the members of the NUNA Executive Committee listed in this Newsletter to express your interest in volunteer activities.

Send your NUNA Membership to:

Jan Moyle
 NUNA Treasurer
 200 W 32nd St
 Austin, Texas 78705

By The Numbers: Does NUNA Get Its Piece of The Pie?

By Scott Morris

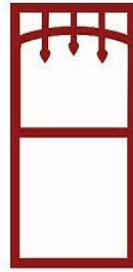
Our 2000 Census profile shows that the North University Neighborhood Planning Area is the third densest in the city. With the observable increase in density as large residential projects opened after the last census and the neighborhood plan rezoning, we can expect the densification trend to be sharply confirmed in the 2010 count. Our land area is roughly 2/3rd's of a mile squared, or 235 acres. The boundaries are Guadalupe St. on the west, 38th Street on the north, Duval on the east, and San Jacinto/27th on the south. If NUNA were a municipal entity, its population would rank among nearby cities such as Bastrop (5,340), Kyle (5,314), Giddings (5,105), Luling (5,080), Marble Falls (4,959), Burnet (4,735), Lago Vista (4,507), and La Grange (4,478). In the 2000 Census, NUNA was about the same size as Westlake Hills (3,116) and Rollingwood (1,403) combined. Our taxable property value is one of the highest in the city outside the central business district, and the discretionary spending of our 18-34 year old segment must deliver a huge sales tax windfall to the city.

NUNA Congratulates UT's Class of 2009!

It happens every year at this time. The feeling of optimism in our community is palpable and contagious as the Class of 2009 celebrates the accomplishment of a lifetime. To the graduates who are moving away, we hope that you will always have fond memories of your home here. You have made North University a place of optimism, vitality, and energy in our city. You are why this is the one special place we want to live. We wish you all success and happiness and please come back and visit often.

With the scale of our economic impact taken into consideration, is NUNA getting its fair share of the budget pie? Does NUNA receive back in services what it delivers in revenue? How do we respond when city officials tell us that there is no money for neighborhood plan implementation such as sidewalks or maintaining a safe environment in our parks? How do we respond when we can't stop illegal structures from being built because there is not enough money for building inspectors or are told to live with the risk of 100 year old water lines without adequate pressure to adequately fight a large structure fire?

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Let us make a concerted effort to explore these questions in the year ahead. Armed with information, we can raise the awareness of our area's needs and ensure that it receive the services it has earned.

2000 NUNA Population Total: 4426

Age 17 and younger: 171 (3.86%)

Age 18-34 3494 (78.94%)

Age 35-64 594 (13.42%)

Age 55 and older 167 (3.77%)

2000 NUNA Housing:

Total Units: 2561

Owner Occupied Units: 333 (13%)

Rental Units: 2136 (83.40%)

Vacant Units: 92 (3.59%)

Thank you!!

The dust has cleared!

**Our thanks to NUNA for patience with our building process!
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary dedicated its new
student apartment, The John F. and Nancy Anderson House,
on May 23, 2009.**



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including NUNA neighbors, city planning staff, representatives from of the Central Austin Neighborhood Planning Advisory Committee (CANPAC), Hyde Park Neighborhood Association (HPNA), the Hyde Park NPT, and the HPNA Development Review Committee.

In a resounding set of 18 specific findings, the NPT voted on May 13th to disapprove the zoning change and FLUM change. On May 15th, the agent for the owners wrote a letter officially withdrawing the case. While the NPT is obviously pleased at this outcome, its members seek to have the recommendation and its findings recorded and recognized by the city. This final step is sought by the NPT to prevent starting over if the plan amendment was re-submitted or some other change of land use was proposed in the future. The research and findings would be retained and accessible by the city.

NPT Hears 32nd St. Demolition and Historic Zoning Case

On April 27th, the City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) voted to initiate a historic zoning case to block the release of a demolition permit sought by the owners of 408 W 32nd Street. This action was the first step in a two step city review process that brings the case back to the HLC for final consideration while allowing more time for the city's historic preservation office to determine whether the property was worthy of historic status. On May 13th, after hosting an open house earlier that afternoon, Stephen Wilkinson brought a proposal to the NPT requesting neighborhood support for the demolition and redevelopment of a house at 408 W 32nd Street. Discussion took place on the proposal, the pending demolition, and historic zoning case. After procedural concerns were raised, the NPT voted against creating

COLUMN STRUCK---AGAIN

Early in the morning of Friday, May 15th, one of our signature neighborhood entry columns at 32nd and Guadalupe was seriously damaged. The car that struck the column, although damaged, was able to drive away. Stephen Wilkinson reported the incident to the police and supplied this picture for the Newsletter.

NPT Recommends Against 38th St. Plan Amendment

The North University Neighborhood Planning Team (NPT) organized two public hearings to obtain input and render a recommendation on a plan amendment proposal for 209 E 38th St. The owner's agent proposed changing the zoning and the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) from single family to multifamily. This was the first applicant-initiated plan amendment case for the North University Neighborhood Planning Area since the Central Austin Combined Neighborhood Plan and the North University Neighborhood Conservation Combining District (NCCD) became law in August 2004. This amendment process and the NPT's role was in response to the City of Austin's plan amendment ordinance which calls for a community meeting to be held and an official recommendation sought from a duly formed NPT.

One of the NPT's goals was to develop a consensus among the interested parties so that policy makers in the Planning Commission and City Council would have a mandate to act under a unified recommendation. 26 people attended the NPT hearing on April 20th,



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a recommendation because there was not enough time for the recommendation to be brought to the NUNA General Membership prior to the HLC hearing to consider initiating historic zoning. At the May 18th HLC meeting, because of quorum concerns, the HLC decided to postpone this matter until June 8th.

NPT Nixes Water Project Staging Area

At the April NUNA meeting, City of Austin Water and Wastewater Utility representatives gave a presentation requesting the lease of part of Adams Park. The lease would be between the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) and a contractor for water improvements in West University. The NUNA General Membership called on the NPT to conduct a public hearing. This process was to collect input and gauge public support for the project while prioritizing needs for Adams-Hemphill Park to ensure that any money from the lease was spent locally. While there was broad agreement on the needs of the park between the interested parties, the PARC was not able to furnish a letter of intent expressing commitment to utilize lease proceeds in Adams-Hemphill Park. With this consideration, and with the numerous concerns expressed in testimony, the NPT voted against the project on April 14th.

Caseload for NPT Increasing

In the 12 month period ending on May 1, 2009, the

Spring Break Theft Up 50%... Prevention Tips for Summer By Scott Morris

UT's finals completion and the onset of summer break bring a near stillness to our neighborhood. This also brings an opportunity for increased crime. Fewer neighbors mean fewer eyes on the street and less frequent contacts between people. The fragile system of watching out for each other takes a hiatus. As it did during Spring Break '09 here in NUNA.

According to APD crime stats, for the two week period straddling Spring Break '09, the number and type of crimes committed were 15 property, 1 violent, 2 drug/alcohol, and 7 nuisance. For the same period in 2008 the crimes committed were 10 property, 1 violent, 0 drug/alcohol, and 8 nuisance.

This summer, the Austin Police Department urges all residents to report any suspicious behavior to 911 immediately and take steps to reduce the opportunity for crime. That includes leaving your vehicle in a well-lit area with nothing inside visible from the outside. In your home put lights on timers, and leave a radio on when you leave. Keep your doors and windows locked, even when you are at home. Get to know your neighbors so you will recognize when someone is out of place. The more we reduce the opportunity for crime in NUNA, the more likely a criminal will move on to an area with easier pickings.

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NPT monitored development on 21 projects, met with developers and/or city officials on 16 projects, developed policy, advocacy or legislation for 8 issues, and conducted land use hearings for 4 projects. About 70% of the NPT's work is conducting a development review function for NUNA and the residents of the planning area.

The objectives of the NPT are to monitor compliance with and implement the North University (NCCD), implement the recommendations of and make recommendations on plan amendments to the CACNP as they apply to the North University Neighborhood Planning Area (NPA), serve as an educational resource for residents, and to make other specific recommendations on any land use case. NPT members are all volunteers. The current members are Bill Bednar (vice chair), Mary Ingle, Rick Iverson, June Hawley, Scott Morris (chair), Doug Plummer, Kimberly Renner, and Steven Tomlinson (secretary).

The NPT is an excellent way to serve one's community. We meet every second Wednesday at 6:30 P.M. at the AGE Building, 3710 Cedar St. These meetings are always public and you are welcome to sit in or bring your ideas. Join the area's Yahoo Group at nuna-residents-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to find out more about upcoming meeting dates and times.