

Eastside Environmental News

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative



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ISSUE 2

Montopolis Bridge Clean-Up Pleases Residents

For years, residents of the River Bluff Neighborhood Association complained about trash, noise and other illegal activities that had become part of the area under the Montopolis Bridge. Residents were upset that this area had gone from a quiet, scenic, recreational area to a dumping ground and polluted river. According to residents, much of this occurred during weekends of wild revelry.

They frequently reported people washing their cars, rinsing away all the dirt and soap in the river. They called about people changing their oil and flushing their radiators, allowing motor oil and antifreeze to drain directly into the river. Revelers would throw empty bottles and cans into the river next to children swimming. The Colorado River Preserve, right next to the bridge, was more of a dumping ground for tires, trash and furniture.

Years of these complaints passed, however, the citizens were persistent and continued calling local law enforcement and state agencies. They knew the solution wasn't easy because it was difficult to catch individuals in the act of polluting.



Montopolis Bridge area dramatically improved

Field Notes...



Oscar Garza

Over this past year, I am pleased to have heard from several East Austin organizations and from a number of individuals asking about volunteer opportunities. I am pleased because one of our goals is to encourage community participation and communication. This is important because it opens the door for us to work with the community and lets you know what the City can do to make East Austin a better place to live.

This communication gave us the opportunity to work with the Stonegate/Cedar Valley community to address concerns they have about their neighborhood. It gave us an opportunity to provide a presentation about City conservation services to the Austin Heights Neighborhood Association. It's also responsible for an effort undertaken by several City and State agencies that led to a successful cleanup of the Montopolis Bridge area (see article).

In keeping with the spirit of communication, I would like to extend an invitation to take our East Austin Environmental Initiative survey. You can let us know how we can improve our program and services. You can take our survey online at http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watershed/east_austin_initiative.htm

As always, please feel free to contact me, Oscar Garza, at 974-1893 or email at oscar.garza@ci.austin.tx.us.

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But things really started to change after the local newspaper ran a story about the problem. Many other people took notice, and shortly, a group of elected officials, including Councilmember Mike Martinez, State Representative Eddie Rodriguez and Senator Kirk Watson organized a team of several state and city agencies to commit to make the area cleaner and safer.

The area improved dramatically after Texas Parks Wildlife Dept began issuing citations and the Austin Police Dept and the Parks and Recreation Dept said they would increase patrols of the area. City of Austin Watershed Protection staff investigated pollution complaints at the site. Texas Department of Transportation installed a parking area with barriers to keep vehicles from driving to the edge of the river. Officials now hope that community leaders and volunteers will continue to help keep the area clean and enjoyable for a nice, quiet family picnic.

Austin Clean Water Partners Program

The Austin Clean Water Partners Program is a cooperative effort between the City of Austin Watershed Protection Department and local auto repair and fueling businesses meant to reduce pollution and water quality degradation of our creeks and lakes. Our Department's mission is to protect water quality and aquatic wildlife habitat for the enjoyment of all citizens.



The program was developed because protecting water quality depends on everyone- including business owners and employees. If you volunteer to become a member of this program, you must commit to meeting five criteria that will enhance our pollution prevention efforts. City staff are available to help walk you through the process.

1) Have a current City Stormwater Discharge Permit and certification of an inspection by the Stormwater Discharge Permit Program within the last 3 years.

2) Have a written Spill Contingency Plan posted for employees. The City can provide a model to help with the creation of your plan. This plan must identify the procedures and materials used for proper spill clean ups.

3) Maintain records of all hazardous material and petroleum purchases, as well as records of disposal activities. Material Safety Data Sheets must be available for all chemicals purchased.

4) Verify (e.g. dye tracing, plumbing plans) where all exterior and interior floor drains, traps, and sumps are plumbed. The City may provide dye tracing. Any storm drains on the property must be labeled to educate both employees and the public. The City will provide the labeling kit.

5) Participate in the City's Waste Reduction Assistance Program by having a free, non-regulatory waste reduction assessment conducted at your business.

When you successfully meet the above criteria, the City will recognize you for your special efforts. You will receive the following:

- A detailed handbook to train employees
- A colorful poster that demonstrates appropriate shop practices.
- A membership plaque to display at your facility
- Austin Clean Water Partners T-shirts for your employees.
- A sign to post in your shop window
- Customer countertop brochures.

The sign and countertop brochures will inform your customers that you are a partner with the City of Austin to help protect Austin's creeks, lakes, and community health and safety. Today's consumers are looking for environmentally conscious businesses. You will also be officially recognized by the City through newsletters and news releases distributed to local newspapers, radio and television stations.

Join us! Become an environmental leader in your industry, and help make a difference for our future.

To become a partner with the City or to get more information, call Chris Miller at 974-2550 or visit our website at: www.cityofaustin.org/watershed/clean_water_partners.htm.

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Our Current Clean Water Partners:

Advanced Automotive	7528 Burnet Road	454-3454
Arbor Car Wash	10401 Jollyville Road	346-8050
Auto Gate Austin	435 Industrial Blvd.	444-2283
Ben's Workshop	410 Pressler Street	472-5555
Brake Check # 17	205 E. Ben White Blvd.	448-1221
Bridgestone Firestone	2500 W. Palmer Lane	388-6060
Bridgestone Firestone	6412 S. I35	442-9388
Caliber Collision Centers	8735 N. Lamar Blvd	836-0000
Caliber Collision Centers	6222 Manchaca Road	443-2244
Capital Chevrolet	6200 S. I35	445-1228
Capital Metro	2910 E. 5th Street	389-7411
Capital V Connection	4201 S. Congress Ave.	441-1334
Champion Toyota	4800 S. I35	440-4500
Charlie & Ann's Exxon	5400 Balcones Drive	452-5422
East First Grocery	1811 E. Cesar Chavez St.	477-0988
Ellis & Salazar	4501 S. Congress Ave.	444-5555
E-Z Food Store #5	6400 S. 1st Street	447-5825
Flamingo Automotive	3512 Guadalupe Street	459-9917
Goodyear Auto	907 E. 41st Street	459-6554
Great Hills Automotive	5346 Thunder Creek Rd.	795-2995
Jiffy Lube	Spicewood Springs Rd.	345-1274
Joe Angell Auto	4222 S. 1st Street	444-6721
Lamb's Tire & Auto	3564 Far West Blvd.	345-6600
Leonard Johnson's Garage & Muffler Ctr.	4401 S. 1st Street	445-2892
Lexus of Austin	9910 Stonelake Blvd.	343-3400
Marks American Car Care	6303 Cameron Road	459-1486
Maxwell Ford	5000 S. I35	443-5000
Mazda South	4506 S. I35	462-3131
Mopac Auto Service	3500 Hyridge Drive	346-0438
Redline Automotive & Marine	4705 Weidemar Lane	441-0416
Rising Sun Japanese Auto Service	2714 Foster Lane	433-6292
Swedish Auto Service	11008 N. Lamar Blvd.	836-0022
Travis Engine Center	2406 Hidalgo Street	476-6837
Zimmer's Auto Shop	2313 Thorton Rd. #C	445-6731
Infiniti of Austin	8140 Burnet Road	453-0660

I-35 Makeover Project Reconnects East Austin

For a long part of Austin's history, Interstate Highway 35 (I35) has symbolized a class divide between East and West Austin. But the I35 Makeover Coalition, a diverse group of citizens, businesses and neighborhood leaders, recently took a big step towards making the I35 area an asset. Since 2004, the coalition has been working on a collaborative effort to transform and revitalize the parking area under the highway between 6th St and 8th Streets. Their goal was to create a safe, clean and attractive gateway that serves to reconnect downtown to East Austin.



I35 Makeover project aims to reconnect downtown to East Austin

After many years, the I35 Makeover Project got underway in early summer of 2010. The project reconstructed the existing parking area and features a grand arching state-of-the-art lighting fixture provided by the city's Art in Public Places Program. It includes large pedestrian walkways and landscaping designed by the Texas Department of Transportation that enhances the aesthetics and safety of the area.

The project, funded by the City of Austin and by a \$250,000 grant from Keep Austin Beautiful for the landscaping, is expected to be completed this year. Supporters of the project say this is a big step forward toward bridging East and West Austin.

For more information contact Michelle Frith with the City of Austin, Public Works at 512-974-2436.

Conservation and Brownfields in East Austin

Conservation means to preserve and protect natural resources. Brownfield is the name given to a property that may be considered contaminated. The reuse of a brownfield provides an excellent opportunity to contribute to land conservation.



The East Village on 11th Street, once a lot with dilapidated structures, now provides residences above a retail area

Brownfield sites are typically found in industrial areas but, in some cases, they are also mixed within residential areas. This conflicting pattern exists in East Austin and

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Where to Call for Pollution Information & Assistance

CITY OF AUSTIN NUMBERS

General non-emergency
311

Health & Human Services Department
972-5600

Austin Clean Water Partners Program
974-2550

East Austin Environmental Initiative
974-1893

Pollution Hotline (24 Hr.)
974-2550

Household Hazardous Waste program
974-4343

Public Information Office
974-2220

Solid Waste Services Customer Service
494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints
974-3355

Austin Water Utility
(sewage complaints 24 Hr.)
972-1000

Zoning and Building Use Complaints
974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office
974-1954

OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority
473-3307

CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 974-2250

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Martinez 974-2264

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Chris Riley 974-2260
Laura Morrison 974-2258
Randi Shade 974-2255
Bill Spellman 974-2256
Sheryl Cole 974-2266

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creates unique challenges for redevelopment. The key challenge is to maintain the diversity of land use by promoting compatibility and preserving residential use and natural resources. These challenges are identified in the East Austin neighborhood plans (City of Austin Adopted Neighborhood Plans <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/zoning/adopted.htm>).

The City of Austin Brownfields Revitalization Office (ABRO) supports conservation through the reuse of these properties. The following is a list of properties in East Austin, that the ABRO has helped redevelop to better serve the community.

- Stop-N-Tote at 2715 E. 5th St., a former gas station is now a convenience store with plans to add a laundry mat and low income apartments
- The East Village at 1200 E. 11th St., once a vacant lot with dilapidated structures and illegal dumping now provides residences above a retail area with a rooftop garden
- African American Heritage Center at 912 E. 11th St., will be built on a vacant lot that once had dilapidated structures

For additional information, visit: www.austinbrownfields.org or call Catherine Esparza at (512) 974-1954.

Austin's Water—A Precious Resource

Water. It's one of the most basic elements of life. We need it to survive. We drink it, swim in it, water our yards with it. We use water to wash our dishes, our clothes and ourselves. We even use it to put out fires, saving property and lives. But most of us don't know very much about our water other than it's there when we turn on the faucet. Austin Water, the City-owned water utility, wants to change that.

"We want our customers to understand where their water comes from and what is involved in getting it to their homes and businesses," says Greg Meszaros, Director of Austin Water. "People tend to protect the things they value. The more they understand our water resources, the more inclined they will be to safeguard those resources."

The first thing Meszaros wants people to know is that the City draws its water from the Colorado River. While some other areas around Austin draw water from underground water sources, such as aquifers, Austin Water relies on the surface water of the river to serve its nearly one million customers.

Because droughts are not uncommon in Central Texas, there is always a concern that long periods without rainfall can cause a water shortage. Both underground and surface water sources rely on adequate rainfall to ensure there is enough water to serve the region. That's where Austin Water's conservation programs come in. "In 2009, we saw extreme drought conditions, but due to the conservation efforts of our customers, we saved 2.5 billion gallons of water," says Meszaros. "Conserving water and protecting the environment are core values at Austin Water. We can help you conserve water and possibly help you lower your bills." Conserving our water isn't just good for today; it's the right thing to do for future generations.

Visit WaterWiseAustin.org for more details on how you can help in the effort to conserve our valuable water resource.

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