

Peace on Earth



Once a year, thanks to The Houser family, we admire the “Peace on Earth” sign of lights posted on the corner of 45th and Mopac. I thought it would be nice to acknowledge The Houser’s kind, creative, and thoughtful efforts and put emphasis on a phrase that we might not always take to heart. When I contacted Mrs. Holly Houser to ask her about the history of the sign she said “it always amazes me that we get so many positive notes, comments, etc. about the sign when it really is just so simple”.

It is a simple phrase isn’t it? Perhaps you know of it as a phrase from the bible: “Peace on earth and good will toward men.” The angels said this to the shepherds when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. While this may be part of a biblical scripture, it translates to all, regardless of beliefs. Peace on earth = give peace a chance. Good will to all men = be good to one another.

Holly’s husband Larry passed on in 2004 and a group of his friends decided to continue it. When Mr. Houser passed, his family had his service at the NW Pony field and the Peace on Earth crew deemed it appropriate to take the sign to the ballpark!

Hopefully, this holiday season and throughout the years of our everyday lives, we take this phrase to heart. So simply put, we wish for Peace on Earth and good will to all.

A warm thank you to Holly Houser and her son Austin for continuing to share their family tradition that inspires so many.

*Happy Holidays,
Tonianne Soster*

A Neighborhood Perspective

Development of the Bull Creek Road State-Owned Lands Area, and Additional West Austin Areas

Development of the state-owned tract of land at 45th and Bull Creek Road is likely to commence in the near future. Many of you have read updates on the HPWBANA listserve concerning this, and our November neighborhood association meeting featured two speakers closely involved in the project, but with differing points of view.

This article attempts to hit just a few high points, but there has been much work, activity, meeting, discussion etc. done; there is a great deal of information on the Facebook page which has been put up by the coalition described below (BCRC). To access this, log in to Facebook and search on “Bull Creek Road Coalition”. In addition, we are trying to do timely updates via the neighborhood listserve, hpwbana.org, so if you’re not subscribed to it, please consider doing it now. In the same vein, this article is being written mid-December for the January newsletter so some items will necessarily be a bit ‘behind’.

On the table is an unsolicited commercial development proposal from Stratus Corp., whose CEO is Beau Armstrong; the proposal ‘came to light’ via an Austin American-Statesman article in the summer timeframe. The Stratus proposal includes a big-box HEB store of 93,000 sq ft with accompanying gas stations, two high-rise office buildings, apartments of a size and scale to duplicate the Post Apartments across Bull Creek Road from the tract, and retail space, to include shops, restaurants, a movie theatre, large paved surface parking fields to support the commercial areas and some green space. At the November HPWBANA meeting, our neighbors expressed the same concerns that all other neighborhoods have expressed, the foremost being massively increased traffic in an already maxed out, congested area. Stratus has shown some willingness to modify its proposal in light of a consistent set of objections from all neighborhoods affected and has actually shown various versions at different neighborhood association meetings; Beau Armstrong promised an updated version of their site plan “within a week” at the November 19 HPWBANA meeting, but nothing has been made available as of mid-December.

Area homeowners and residents were represented by John Eastman, president of Bull Creek Road Coalition (BCRC), which is a coalition

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Highland Park West Balcones Area

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The HPWBANA Board meets on the third Monday of each month except December. Please go to HPWBANA.org for our current meeting location or contact president@HPWBANA.org.

HWPBANA is bordered on the north by 2222, on the south by 35th St., on the west by Mt. Bonnell Rd., and on the east by MoPac and by Bull Creek Rd. between Hancock Dr. and 45th St. Mail your membership dues to HPWBANA, P.O. Box 26101, Austin, Texas 78755

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Neighborhood Perspective (Continued from Cover Page)

of seven neighborhood associations surrounding the Bull Creek Road property. John outlined the issues which have been identified by surrounding residents including: traffic (the overall, overwhelming first concern as demonstrated repeatedly in neighborhood meetings, surveys, etc), preservation of the natural beauty of the site by setting aside part of it as parkland use (which is a significant ad hoc usage today), flood control, inadequate infrastructure and taxpayer born costs of providing it, emergency access, minimizing impact of traffic and commercial lighting on surrounding neighbors – and the list goes on.

The entire P3 situation is one saturated in state and local politics. In the last state legislative session, P3 (Public-Private Partnership) legislation was passed in the final days of the session. It seeks to identify underutilized state-owned land which can be leased long-term for development and be built out by private developers; undeniably this could have potential benefits for Texas taxpayers. Historically the General Land Office has managed land leases (examples in Austin are the Triangle and Central Market areas). However, the Texas Facilities Commission (TFC), headed by Terry Keel, has stepped forward to broker identified underutilized state land development under P3. This is in contrast to Texas Facilities Commission's historic role which has been to manage existing state facilities, contracting for maintenance, supplies, etc. TFC was already slated for review by the state's Sunset Commission and that report was published in late November. TFC has been criticized for lack of defined processes, for taking the position they are not required to follow local land development codes, for having 'guidelines' rather than stated operating rules for their proposed P3 activity, for excessive secrecy (TFC has filed with Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

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Join The HPWBANA Yahoo Group

The HPWBANA Yahoo Group is a neighborhood listserv intended for discussion and announcements of interest.

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Neighborhood Perspective *(Continued from Page 2)*

to be excluded from the requirement of the Texas Open Records Act), and for not having sufficient staff or expertise to manage P3 developments. The Sunset Commission recommended that no TFC actions be taken under the P3 legislation until September, 2013 to give TFC time to 'ramp up' and make necessary preparations to be successful in managing P3 development. BCRC learned that another state agency report is due mid-December from the Texas House Governmental Affairs Committee, and that its findings will closely follow those of the Sunset Commission report.

Despite these evaluations of the TFC P3 process, the City of Austin recently entered into an InterLocal Agreement contract with TFC. Although BCRC members read, studied, and briefed City Council members on its shortcomings, Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole pressed hard for its adoption and was ultimately successful on Dec. 6. BCRC does not feel this contract is a positive for Austin residents and taxpayers because it requires using city staff resources to perform studies of areas to be developed, to fund such studies and yet City of Austin will be excluded from participation once negotiations with a developer start. BCRC continues to believe this contract is premature because the next legislature will almost certainly make significant changes to TFC as it acts on the Sunset Commission Report. Mayor

Pro Tem Cole said repeatedly that it was best for Austin to "have a seat at the table", yet under the contract that seat can be yanked out from under Austin's participation the minute real negotiations start. As BCRC President John Eastman noted, it's a good thing for the City of Austin to have a seat at the table, "but that table hasn't even begun to be constructed yet."

Beyond the political maneuverings, several very worthwhile projects have been undertaken by area residents. If you are interested in volunteering, opportunities exist for the following:

Tree survey – an inventory of heritage trees including GPS location, species, measurement and description. Many exceptional liveoaks and cedar elms have been found; results will be posted on a Google map website

Shoal Creek has been evaluated by a Professional Engineer certified in water resources – the condition of the creek now contrasted with its appearance and use prior to City of Austin's constructing a sewer line down the creekbed in the 1960's. The potential for its restoration to become a feature of the development is exciting

Pamphlet to present the tract – some of the 75 acres has fine natural areas as would be expected on a plot remaining virtually untouched since the days of the Republic of Texas. There are vistas, bluebonnets

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in the spring, a field of blue sage in bloom in the fall, magnificent trees, a historic site – all of which need to be documented if there is any hope of obtaining parkland designation for any part of the property.

Design Standards – a document describing standards and characteristics of a development ‘friendly’ to surrounding neighborhoods is being prepared. Our area is fortunate to have amazing resources – national experts in such matters many of whom have already generously donated substantial time and effort.

The input of everyone concerned will be needed and solicited as this development activity goes on – and it will go on. The InterLocal Agreement Contract the City of Austin signed with Texas Facilities Commission names five Austin tracts, and the 75 acre tract at Bull Creek Road is only the first. There will be calls for residents to make their wishes known to various city and state government groups as the P3 process continues to evolve. P3 represents huge, huge amounts of money and vast land holdings statewide; the importance of getting it right, doing the peoples’ work in public, trying to guard the value of our homes and neighborhoods, and continuing efforts to influence the process to become a more positive one simply cannot be underestimated.

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HPE Green Team in Action!

On Saturday, Nov 10, the Highland Park PTA "Green Team" coordinated a volunteer work day with Friends of Perry Park. In addition to being a favorite place for neighborhood residents to walk, several teachers at Highland Park use the trails at Perry Park as part of their classroom activities. We had a nice showing of students, parents and community members who participated, and we spent 2 hours doing maintenance on an interpretive trail. We cleared a loop trail of overgrowth, cactus and overhanging tree limbs. In addition, the kids dispersed native seeds (down on the bottom part of Perry Park).

The Green Team and Friends of Perry Park are planning another such volunteer Service Day in the spring and are always appreciative of additional volunteers! The HPE Green Team and community volunteers gather to help with the maintenance of the Perry Park Nature Trails.



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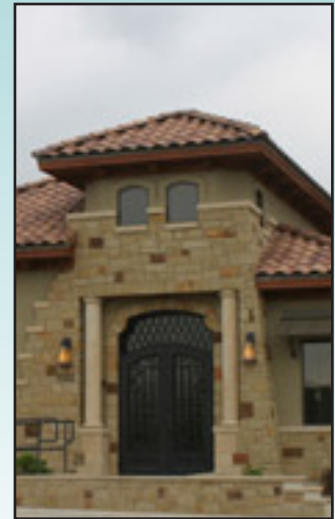


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