

A Peaceful, Livable Neighborhood?

By Scott Barnes

A recent article in the Austin-American Statesman describes the North University area as "the refuge of grads or upper classmen who've gotten the summer camp rowdiness of East Riverside Street and West Campus out of their systems and just want a place that's quiet and close to campus". It also refers to the unique mix of college students and longer term residents who call this place home. This diversity within NUNA encompasses all ages, ethnic groups, and income levels, and key to the success of this melting pot within our neighborhood is the respect and courtesy that our residents from different backgrounds have always demonstrated towards each other to achieve a peaceful coexistence.

Within recent weeks there has been a rise in reports of disturbances occurring in campus area neighborhoods, including ours. These incidents range from excessively loud late night parties to public intoxication. None of the behaviors that typically result from these activities is conducive to neighborhood peace and security. To address this situation, NUNA is coordinating efforts with other affected single-family neighborhoods close to the University, and the initial support from city staff and the Austin Police Department has been encouraging. One short term goal is to seek enforcement of existing codes, such as the noise ordinance, which prohibits making noise which is audible to an adjacent residence between 10:30 PM and 7 AM. We are also asking for monitoring of under-age drinking which is suspected to be occurring at some of the loud parties, and for prosecution of those who are publicly intoxicated. Neighbors have witnessed inebriated individuals get behind the wheel after some of these parties, thus endangering the lives of both the driver and innocent citizens they may encounter on the road.

Longer-term goals may be asking the City to reconsider the occupancy levels of current single-family dwellings. The current level, which is six, is much higher than the national average, and some college towns such as Lubbock only allow for two unrelated adults per dwelling. We may also need to consider extending the open container law north to 38th Street to put the reins on public outdoor drinking. In the meantime, if you are being disturbed by late night noise or other disruptive behavior, please do not hesitate to call 911 to report the situation. NUNA has a long-standing commitment to protect the quality of life of its residents. 

NUNA Meeting

Monday, December 5, 2005, 7 p.m.
First English Lutheran Church
3001 Whitis

Agenda

- Daryl Slusher-guest speaker
- Bylaws Update
- Update on Sparky Park

Noise in NUNA Again!

By Mary Gay Maxwell

The plague of the North University Neighborhood (and others around UT also) is NOISE, in particular loud parties, and drunk and disorderly people shouting, wreaking havoc on our yards and streets, and invading the peace of our homes. We have noticed that this has increased dramatically this Fall since September, and we are taking steps to put a stop to it in a more effective manner than previously. We are in the process of working with APD, with City staff and the City Manager, and with City Council members in order to come up with a more lasting solution to this issue.

The reasons we have decided to take decisive action at this time are: 1) we have assisted the city in planning for increased density in our area, and now we need their help in assisting us with this issue which we anticipate will be an unintended consequence of density; and 2) we are aware that with more people will come more noise unless the issue is addressed now. In fact, the noise has escalated this year already, and we believe there are several reasons for this: 1) binge-drinking among college students which seems to be a current phenomenon, and 2) the use of single-family houses for multi-family purposes, i.e., renting to too many unrelated adults. This has resulted in a number of unofficial "frat houses" and "rooming houses," neither of which are permitted in single-family zoned areas.

We have met with APD officers who have jurisdiction over our neighborhood, Commander Smith, Sergeant McDonald, and Officer Vargas. They are very willing to be of assistance, and a number of actions have been taken and others are planned. A list of "problem properties" has been compiled for our neighborhood in order for APD to send out a warning letter to those properties that have been reported at least twice in the past few months for

noise violations. The officers have asked that neighbors who are having difficulty with noisy parties, and loud, drunken, or aggressive behavior by people congregating at the parties, call 911 in order to document the problem for APD and to request aid from APD.

Without documenting properties that are problematic, the Police Department cannot utilize the warning letter approach. So it is to your advantage to call 911 in order that APD can assist us. APD has also requested that you call 911 rather than trying to stop the problem yourself, because you put yourself at risk of being accosted or assaulted.

In the past, there have been problems during the Christmas light extravaganza on 37th Street. We discussed this with the officers. Commander Smith is willing to station two officers in the Christmas lights block on 37th Street to assist with maintaining order while the thousands of visitors pass by to view the lights. We do not want a repeat of past incidents involving intoxicated visitors, and we hope that this will deter anything of that nature occurring this year.

The noise issue is the result of many other factors besides the need for more police presence in the area. The City of Austin has been lacking in code enforcement personnel, and the permitting of non-complying structures has occurred too many times in our area. These are the properties where many of the problems occur. In addition, there is an ordinance in effect that allows up to 6 unrelated adults to live in a single-family dwelling. There is a need to change that rule and to reduce the occupancy limit for unrelated adults in our single-family neighborhoods, which serves to open the door to unofficial "frat houses" and "rooming houses," and to unruly, out of control parties.

Austin is experiencing "growing pains," and developing a method for dealing with unnecessary noise in densely populated areas is one of the many challenges we are facing as a city as we become larger. Interestingly, New York City manages its noise issues far better than Austin does! There are ways to regulate noise of various kinds and to make our city a pleasant place to live. If we are to grow through increasing density in the central core rather than contribute to more urban sprawl, we must address these issues. 

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Sparky Park Update

By Mary Ingle

If you've walked by the former North Austin Substation on Grooms Street recently, you've probably noticed some dramatic changes in the landscape of the electrical yard. The lattice towers and scaffoldings have been removed along with one of the transformers and many of the concrete pads. Slowly but surely Austin Energy is thoroughly transforming the space so that a pocket park might eventually come into being. We certainly are excited about the transformations!

To make the park financially viable, Austin Energy and NUNA are working out an agreement with T-Mobile, a cell phone company which occupies the cell tower closest to Grooms Street. This agreement would make up-front "seed" money available for starting the park to the tune of \$99,353 for a four-year term, with the option of renewal between the cell phone company, Austin Energy, and the neighborhood. These initial monies will be paid all at once in January and probably will reside in a capital fund created for this park by the City Manager. Austin Energy has also volunteered mitigation money to buy some trees for the park; the amount will be determined soon.

Along with these financial arrangements, other agreements need to be drafted as well. Bill Bednar and Ryan Beard are working on a use agreement for the park and the substation building. Terms for how to use the building, reserving the space, who will keep the key, etc. are being written up in this document. Another document, a 501 non-profit status for the neighborhood is also being drafted by Bill Bednar; along with the ability to raise money and have tax deductions for donors with this non-profit status, new bylaws for NUNA are also being written. On November 7, NUNA hosted an open Steering Committee meeting for the whole neighborhood to review the new bylaws. As one can imagine, the process is slow; we will need to meet again to finish reviewing the document. The completed bylaws will be ratified by the whole neighborhood. All neighbors are encouraged to participate in this process.

Regarding the status of the park, we are in the early stages of planning, the design phase. To date, we have had three planning charrettes with architects Simon Atkinson and Robin Abrams. We are eagerly awaiting the revisions of the plans from our last meeting on August 27. Stay tuned to the web-site, <http://www.main.org/nuna>, for the date and time of our next meeting to review the final plans, or call Mary Ingle at 320-8449 to be informed of the next meeting. 

What Is CANPAC, Anyway?

By Mary Gay Maxwell

Good question! CANPAC is the Central Austin Neighborhoods Planning Area Committee, comprising representatives of seven neighborhoods: West University, Shoal Crest, Heritage, North University, Hancock, Eastwoods, and University Area Partners. CANPAC was organized prior to the City of Austin's planning process for future land-use and new zoning of all the properties in our area of the city. As most of you know, the planning process

took about three years of hard work on the part of many neighbors and on the part of the CANPAC representatives. We met with landowners and homeowners, UT students, commercial interests, and City staff, to work out future land-use and zoning categories that would be satisfactory for all interested parties. The new "Combined Central Austin Neighborhoods Plan" was approved by the Austin City Council in August, 2004.

CANPAC is still active, and we are now an official neighborhood registered with the City of Austin, so that we can continue to receive notices of any requests for zoning changes or alterations in the new plan. Currently, the Coordinator of the group is Mary Gay Maxwell, former co-president of NUNA. NUNA has other representatives to the group as well. We are in the process of establishing official voting status rules for the group, but we ALWAYS welcome visitors to our meetings. If you have an interest in attending a CANPAC meeting, please contact Mary Gay at 472-5958.

There are two items which are currently being worked on: 1) noise problems in all of our neighborhoods, and 2) prospective changes in the UNO district. The UNO (University Neighborhood Overlay) District is the area known as "West Campus." During the planning process, an overlay was placed on the West Campus area allowing for increased heights, up to 175 feet. Just one year after the plan was completed, there is pressure to increase the heights in the core of the UNO area to 220 feet. This is an item that will be discussed at length in the CANPAC group.

The noise issue has been a chronic problem in all of our neighborhoods, but this year the problem has escalated. In the coming years, it could potentially become worse because of the plan for increased density in the planning area. Density will impact our neighborhoods in many ways, one of which is increased noise. We are addressing the issue with the City of Austin staff, the City Council, and the Austin Police Department. 



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Roving ANC Reporter's Update for September and October

By Mary Ingle

In September, the Austin Neighborhood Council (ANC) program focused attention on the City's Code Enforcement Program with Leon Barba and Keith Leach as presenters. They spoke about structural reorganization in Solid Waste Services and in the Watershed Protection Developmental Review Department, with the addition of **more code inspectors** for accessing situations and violations. The next topic, Austin Energy's Conservation Vision featured Roger Duncan who elaborated on the pilot "Plug-in Program" for electric cars. The goal of this program is to spread nationally with its roots in Austin. Austin's Mayor Wynn has heartily endorsed the program. Austin Energy wants all neighborhood organizations to become aware of this new program; and NUNA will welcome former Council Member Daryl Slusher to give a presentation on the new Plug-in Program at the next NUNA meeting on December 5.

The October meeting of the ANC covered a presentation of the County and City Bond elections. County Court Judge Samuel T. Biscoe and County Commissioner for Pct. 2 Karen Sonleitner explained the 5-year cycle of County Bonds; Jim Walker spoke about the City Bond package. Neighborhoods are encouraged to put together a plan or "wish-list" for improvements. We also learned from Mr. Walker that the bond issue concerning sidewalks is only for repair, not for new sidewalks. Afterwards, Katie Larsen, a senior staff-member for Austin planning, informed the group of a pilot Parking Benefit District Program, which accrues money from paid parking either in the form of meters or parking "chips" on the street (which can be activated by cell-phone users). The program was designed to discourage spill-over parking into neighborhoods from business districts and to reinvest the collected money for neighborhood projects such as sidewalks. A possible advantage of paid parking is that it can be coupled with the Residential Permit Parking Program. The deadline for submitting requests for this program was November 19, 2005. 

NUNA Neighborhood Planning Team Report

By Scott Morris

The Central Austin Combined Neighborhood Plan contains many recommendations for projects in NUNA, but it identifies no means of funding them. Bonds, an appropriate tool for funding capital improvement projects, could help realize some of these plan goals. Since the neighborhood planning process is relatively new, and the last bond election was held in 2000, funding items in a neighborhood plan with bond money is a novel approach. In February 2005, the City

Council directed staff to prepare for a possible bond election in May 2006. Council also empaneled the Bond Election Advisory Committee (BEAC) to serve as a fact-finding body and liaison to neighborhood groups. The NUNA Neighborhood Planning Team met in August to discuss and recommend projects from the Central Austin Combined Neighborhood Plan. The NUNA-NPT selected the following recommendations:

- Build new sidewalks on University Ave. from 30th St. to 31st St., 32nd St. from Speedway to Duval St., 34th St. from Guadalupe to Speedway.
- Remove obstacles from the right of way on Guadalupe Street, specifically the light poles in the sidewalks between 32nd St. and 34th St.
- Install a bike lane along Guadalupe St. between 24th St. and 45th St.
- Provide pedestrian-oriented lighting along the perimeter of the Hemphill Park that complements the historic character of Aldridge Place.
- Provide funds to convert the electric substation on Grooms to a park/recreation use.
- Finally, not included in the plan, addressing the frequent flooding of the roadways and properties in NUNA caused by Waller Creek.

Representatives from the NUNA-NPT presented these six recommendations to BEAC in two public hearings in October, corresponded with committee members, and held discussions with City staff. It is not known whether any of the plan recommendations were in the BEAC recommendation. In the days to come, BEAC will finalize their recommendations and forward them to City Council in January.

Membership in the NUNA-NPT is open to all NUNA residents interested in the subject of land use. Please contact Scott Morris at smorris@nuna-austin.org or 371-7961 if you would like to join. The NUNA NCCD and a link to the city's web-site for the Central Austin Combined Neighborhood Plan can be found on NUNA's web-site: nuna-austin.org. 

Notice of Meeting for Variance Request

When: December 14, 2005 6:30 p.m.

Where: 3710 Cedar St., AGE Building Dining Hall

The NUNA Neighborhood Planning Team will hear a request to endorse a variance application for 117 Laurel Lane. The variance sought will reduce the minimum lot size from 7,000 to 6,300 sq.ft. to accommodate a two-family use so that a 330 sq.ft. guest-house can be built.