# WCNA WALNUT CREEK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

# NEWSLETTER

33 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

A PUBLICATION FOR AND BY THE MEMBERS OF THE WALNUT CREEK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC. AUSTIN, TEXAS 78753

January - February 2009 Issue No. 1



## THE UNTOLD AUSTIN HOUSING MARKET **STORY**

By Your neighbor Jill Leberknight Jill@kw.net

The housing market and mortgage scene sure has received a lot of media coverage in 2008. It seems like conversations of home sales and market values has become as popular a topic around tables and bars as college football & politics, and that's saying a lot because this has been quite an exciting year for both.

Indeed a lot of drama has occurred in '08 that merits some hearty chitchat but I believe the Austin media has unfortunately missed celebrating some rather unique and worthwhile perspectives on the local real estate front.

To start, did you know that Forbes. com ranked Austin #2 in their list of "Best Cities to Buy in the Country" and #1 of the "Fastest Growing Metros?" Forbes.com also listed Austin as one of the top cities in the country to see home prices rise

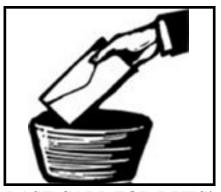
in the coming years and the Housing Predictor, an independent real estate market forecast group, ranked Austin #6 in the nation for the best market to watch in 2009!

Additionally – although KVUE or KXAN might not have a reason to share the 2008 home sales report for our very own Walnut Creek Neighborhood – our community STATS were just as newsworthy. Did you know that the price per square foot (PPSF) rose 3% in Walnut Creek Neighborhood in 2008? PPSF ended 2007 at approximately \$95 and rose to \$97.80 in 08 and up to \$101.56 in Eubank Acres alone with half of these homes sales occurring in the last quarter of the year.

We can also celebrate that the average days on the market for our entire neighborhood is 27 days below the Greater Austin average of 81 days and that inventory has maintained a relatively balanced rate with the average home sale price just shy of \$175,000. That's well within the target range for the average Austin buyer.

This is a remarkable story, I think, considering all the gloom and doom we are hearing on the news these days. Certainly, there have been some changes in the Austin market compared to this time last year but in the national big picture Austinites, and more specifically Walnut Creek Residents, are faring much better than most across the country.

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#### LAST CALL FOR DUES!

O.K. after this we'll get off your back about WCNA dues for a whole year! But seriously, your dues are what keeps our neighborhood association strong and keeps the lines of communication going all year. This newsletter, park maintenance, our annual Neighborhood Nite Out, support for appearances before governmental entities, postage, sign materials, etc., all are financed from WCNA dues. Support WCNA now by sending the coupon on the last page of this newsletter along with \$15.00 to WCNA, PO Box 82746, Austin, Tx 78708-2746.

#### BRAKER/LAMAR **CLEAN-UP**

At the last WCNA board meeting, we decided that, since we do such a good job keeping up the appearance of our Walnut Bluffs Trail, we should see if we can spark some interest for doing the same along the major entrances to the neighborhood, Braker Lane and Lamar. So, some of your

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#### BRAKER/LAMAR CLEAN-UP

(Continued from Page 1)

board members and hopefully some other neighborhood residents will gather on the old Albertson's parking lot at 9:00 a.m. on January 17th. It'll be the same drill as on park work days - breakfast tacos, coffee & juice - then pick up trash and maybe do some weed-eating. If you're one of those neighbors who "Will Work For Tacos", give Jim a call at 836-9521. Another announcement will be made a few days before the event on the WCNA Yahoo Group Email.

## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO "DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS"?

An ongoing problem at a major entry into our neighborhood is the increased number of panhandlers who ply their trade at intersections of Braker Lane at both I-35 and North Lamar. The photo on this page was recently taken at the corner of Braker Ln. and Middle Fiskville. Apparently, a donor left a large plastic bag of clothes with the group of panhandlers that hang out there between begging "shifts" at the Braker/I-35 intersec-

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tion. In turn, the ungrateful panhandlers spread the clothes out on the ground to sit or lay on, then left them for someone else to pick up. The clothes had been lying there for over a week before the picture was taken. The owner of the adjacent shopping center claims that he has posted a no trespassing sign and repeatedly complained to APD, but even when issued citations the unwanted guests gradually return.

Back in the spring, our City Council avoided confronting this issue by commissioning a study instead. In August, the Center for Social Work Research at the University of Texas published preliminary results of a study for the Department of Health and Human Services on public solicitation in Austin in which 103 solicitors were interviewed. Of solicitors surveyed in the UT study, 74 percent had been ticketed for various reasons associated with solicitation. The main reasons given for tickets were pedestrian in roadway, aggressive solicitation, failure to use a crosswalk/sidewalk and camping/sleeping in public.

The survey showed far fewer tickets were given for public intoxication and public urination, possibly because an officer must see this violation take place to give a citation. In the past year, 37 percent of solicitors had received one to four citations and 61 percent had been arrested. The North Central District receives a high volume of calls with complaints about homeless people, many times the same ones. However, the police department has to protect everyone. and civil rights come into play when figuring out how to deal with a homeless person.

How much taxpayer money do you suppose was spent on the "Don't Mess With Texas!" campaign a few years back? Apparently that slogan doesn't apply on the streets of Austin. Essentially, in fear of ACLU litigation, our city officials are not going to do anything about enforcing that empty slogan unless we the taxpayers

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#### AUSTIN HOUSING MARKET STORY

(Continued from Page 1)

So, in an effort to begin the New Year on a positive and hopeful note, I thought I would share this alternative, "untold" story with all of you and continue to tout that WCN is a great place to live and a great place to do real estate in this top ranked city of Austin, Texas. Feel free to call or email me if you have questions about any of this news or want to continue the conversation. I look forward to visiting with you in 2009!

## NEW TRAVIS COUNTY HEALTH CLINIC IS APPROVED

The following was taken from an update by Francoise Luca, Gracywoods Neighborhood Association Media Representative

The TCHD Board of Managers voted "yes" to the purchase of 1210 W. Braker Lane. There was however an important amendment with specific direction to staff on the following:

- A North Central neighborhood and stakeholders advisory board and (or process) will be formed and a formal agreement (contract) be drafted to hold TCHD accountable for the development of the property per the joint recommendations from the advisory board and TCHD.
- The Board wants a formal review of all the costs of the project once the design of the building and functions of the building are finalized and before construction begins.
- A Northeast neighborhood and stakeholder advisory board and/or process will be formed to review the transition of patients to other clinics and how to provide services closer to that community if still needed. The

time line will be within two years from now, so that the Board can decide whether to give up the lease on the Northeast Clinic or not (notice due in two years/ lease is for five).

For surrounding neighborhoods, there is still much to do. We need to organize and nominate representatives to the advisory board. We need to keep communication channels open between our neighborhoods and organizations. We also need to keep up the pressure for accountability and transparency on TCHD. And finally, we need to continue to seek legislative action on changing the appointment of Board members to an elected position.

Thank you all for your support, calls, emails, meetings, protest marches over these last few months. We have made great progress, affected change in our community, and made new friends.



# GOOD NEWS FOR NORTH AUSTIN!

Finally, action is being taken to crack down on the crime problem in neighborhoods to our south. A civil nuisance abatement lawsuit was filed against the owner of the Budget Lodge at Rundberg and IH35 on Dec. 1, and the owner was notified of the lawsuit on Dec. 2. We believe the next step will be

for the owner to answer to the suit and then most likely the attorneys will set an initial hearing date in District court.

Why is this important to you? For the past three years, Austin police have filed affadavits on this and four other properties. This is one of five properties in the I-35 and Rundberg area that harbor criminals and allow their activities on their property.

The District Attorney's Office continually refused to act on APD's request to have these properties shut down despite the crime that was being generated by these businesses. When asked why, the DA's office stated 'there was not enough public outcry'. For the past couple of years, North Austin neighborhood associations have stepped up the "public outcry" and have been putting pressure on the DA's office and insisting that they file on these affadavits.

Our message is simple. If we want to get the crime cleaned up at I-35 and Rundberg, we need the DA's office to insist that all business owners in this area abide by the City's laws and codes. And we need the DA's office to give our police officers back the power to shut down businesses that refuse to do so. Well, the District Attorney's

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## TEXAS TRIVIA



## **QUESTION:**

Where is the world's largest brick? (See page 4 for answer)

# GOOD NEWS FOR NORTH AUSTIN

(Continued from page 3)

office has finally acted.

It is our sincere hope that closing the Budget Lodge will send a strong message to the criminals in North Austin that times have changed.

- They will no longer have places where they can seek refuge from the law.
- Businesses that encourage drugs and prostitution will face legal penalties.
- Our community does back up our police and we will find ways to give our officers the resources they need to stop criminals. And we will continue to do so, no matter how many meetings and protests it takes.

If you want to express your appreciation and let the DA know you support civil nuisance abatements in such cases, send a note to:

Rosemary Lehmberg Travis County D.A. P.O. BOX 1748 Austin, TX 78767

# ONLINE CRIME STATS AVAILABLE

While our district APD representatives consider Walnut Creek to be a relatively low-crime area, you might be surprised to see available crime statistics for us on the APD online crimeviewer. A quick check of the stats for the Walnut Creek Neighborhood Association, Inc. area at: http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/gis/CrimeViewer will probably convince you of the need for

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#### JANUARY ZONING ISSUES

The neighborhood is starting the new year with two zoning change reviews on January 6th. This is the earliest we have had issues of this type. Hopefully this is not a preview of things to come.

The owner Tex-tar Roofing wishes to change the zoning so he can continue to headquarter his business located at the corner of IH-35 and Covington. The current zoning allows limited retail (small consumer convenience shops) and offices.

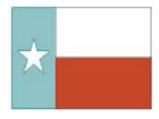
The current business stores equipment and materials and is not legally operating at this location. Since they filed for a zoning change they have been able to continue operation until the request is passed or rejected by the city. This property is not well located for a consumer business. and high costs would be needed to install an office building. The board has recommended the Tex-tar owner install storage buildings on the lot for his materials and equipment and enclose the side and rear of the business with a solid fence. If the zoning were changed to allow office-warehouse, the business could continue. with restrictions that would have it compatible with the neighborhood. There are several "W-LO" businesses located on the Lamar side of the neighborhood.

The current owner of the Walnut Motel along the I-35 frontage between Covington and Thrush wishes to expand his business. The neighborhood had issues with this business in the past and was reluctant to allow the possible 'more-of-the- same' with increased space. Taking into consideration the new owner has already invested in cosmetic improvements to the motel and raised the nightly rate, we are reconsidering the request. If the owner is willing to go through the expense of expanding the business, then the cost of a stay must remain high enough to pay off creditors. To keep the type of clientele willing to pay the higher costs, the business must maintain an acceptable image. This seems like a win-win situation for the neighborhood.

Wayne Tobias will be attending the Zoning and Plating (ZAP) meeting Tuesday, January 6th beginning at 6 PM. The City Council review of these zoning requests with the ZAP recom-

(Continued on Page 5)

# TEXAS TRIVIA



#### **ANSWER**

—The world's largest brick, named Baby Clay, was made by Acme Brick in Denton and weighs more than 6,000 pounds and is 116 inches long. The company used clay from each of its 23 plants to make the brick in celebration of its 116th anniversary last year. It took more than a year for Baby Clay to dry.

#### **ZONING**

(Continued from Page 4)

mendation should be late January or early February. Please contact a board member with comments or if you are interested in attending a meeting.

## SHADY OAKS GARDEN CLUB

Congratulations and a big "thank you" to the following neighbors for brightening our neighborhood during the holiday season. Award winners selected for Outstanding Christmas Display by the Shady Oaks Garden Club were:

*First Place:* The Kolbesons home at 700 Little Oak cast a spell with its wonderland of numerous sparkling Christmas figures. The house and shrubbery were also lighted and a star on the roof shone over all.

#### Honorable Mention:

- The Cannons at 11813 Tedford. Colored lights that neatly outlined the rooflines were very effective. The door and windows all had wreaths and glowed with greenery and colored lights. A conical tree of lights graced the lawn.
- The Kerr-Chappelow home at 11402 Indianhead. The roof and a long, raised planter were outlined in white lights. Red and white-lighted candy canes lined the curved walk and there were several sparkling Christmas trees on the lawn.
- The Espinosa residence at 11902 Whitewing featured a jolly Santa at the front door and the house glowed with flashing lights, all very neat and attractive.

Special Recognition was awarded for a second consecutive year to the entire 11803-11814 block of Cedar Valley Cove. Hopefully this will become a tradition so you can catch



it next year if you've missed it.

Many others deserved mention in that they were very attractive and well done. It was difficult for the judges to select only a few.

Correction from the Nov./Dec. edition: Shady Oaks Nov./Dec. honorable mention address for Rodriquez is 11802 Indianhead.

*<b>CONTRACT* 

## CITY SERVICES REPORT

Progress has been made since our last report on zoning and health violations. As of this Newsletter, two cases are outstanding.

- In the first, the owner of a commercial business on North Lamar will soon face legal action if he doesn't comply with the Office zoning.
- Another who was in the process of installing a used car lot close to Walnut Creek "just up and disappeared", according to the inspector.
- A third violator, within the neighborhood, has yet to comply. The inspector is pursuing the case.

Complaint #08047747, for trash accumulation on Braker Lane. As of the publishing date of this newsletter, the complaint has still not been resolved. This complaint was originally called in back in the spring of 2008. At the time the last WCNA newsletter was published, Code Compliance Officers re-inspected the site and sent a letter to the property owner. Apparently, the property owner ignored the letter. Another complaint will be filed and results of that complaint will be reported in your next newsletter.

Trashed out property, overgrown weeds, cars parked on lawns, etc. are all violations of city ordinances, and have a negative effect on property values. The city Code Compliance Office and/or the Austin Police Department are the enforcement agencies for ordinances. The enforcement of ordinances is complaint driven and citizens are required to call to report a violator. To report a violation, please call (anonymously if you prefer) 311 OR your APD District Representative Office at 974-5722.

# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO "DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS"?

(Continued from Page 2)
do a lot more complaining. If you feel that this issue is effecting your quality of life, contact any or all of your Councilmembers and the Mayor and tell them what you think. Email - http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/council/groupemail.htm or call any or all of the following:

Concilr	nember Cole	974-2266
"	Leffingwell	974-2260
"	Martinez	974-2264
"	Morrison	974-2266
"	Shade	974-2258
Mayor	Winn	974-2250
Mayor I	Protem McCracken	974-2256
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#### ONLINE CRIME STATS AVAILABLE

(Continued from Page 4)
having a good Neighborhood Watch
Program and for just knowing your
neighbors and keeping your eyes
open for suspicious activity. Contact
a WCNA board member if you'd like
to get involved in our Neighborhood
Watch program.

#### CAPITAL METRORAIL UPDATE

Capital MetroRail is preparing for service to begin on the Red Line (substation will be located near Braker & Metric) on Monday, March 30, 2009. The Red Line will run on 32-miles of existing freight tracks between Leander and Downtown Austin. It will provide convenient service for suburban and central Austin residents. Future connections are being studied along existing Capital Metro freight tracks from Downtown to Manor and beyond. Future extensions along TxDOT's abandoned MoKan corridor are also possible.

#### **SCOOP THAT POOP!**

The following appeal was taken off the WCNA News Yahoo Group Email:

"Sorry for this email again this year. We have some maybe new dog walkers in the neighborhood who aren't picking up their dog's poop on their walk about the neighborhood. It's not fair to the neighbors who recieve your dog's deposit, nor is it fun for us neighbors who take your same dog route and either ourselves or our own dog's step in your dog's poop. Please be responsible and bring a bag with you to collect your dog's deposits. You can go to petsmart and buy biodegradable bags to use for this to be even more responsible.

The latest offender(s) that we've noticed are on our route around Caddo, Oakwood and Indianhead -- and it's been ocurring for the last couple of months almost daily and seems to be a medium-large sized dog...so could be a new neighbor walking or someone out walking again since the summer heat is over. We did see someone this am offend on Caddo, but we won't provide a description of this person as perhaps it was a mistake and they've gone back to pick it up. While we ourselves aren't perfect and sometimes forget our bag, we do however go back that same day and pick it up. So please remember to be a good neighbor dog walker and pick up your dog's poop!"

Note: Also, if you are conscientious enough to use pickup bags, you should take them with you and toss them in a trash can -- not simply leave them lying in the street.

#### CHRISTMAS TREE DISPOSAL

If you've put off recycling that once beautiful Christmas tree, take heart you can dispose of them the same way as other yard waste. Residents should use the following guidelines when recycling their trees:

- All trees six feet or taller should be cut in half
- Remove all ornaments, decorations, and tree stand
- Do not place tree in a "tree bag" before setting on the curb
- Only real Christmas trees may be recycled

For the 173,000+ Pay-As-You-Throw customers served by Solid Waste Services, recycling a Christmas tree is as easy as setting it on the curb. Solid Waste Services will pick up all trees with yard trimmings on regularly scheduled collection days. They are then recycled along with yard trimmings to make Dillo Dirt<sup>TM</sup>.

#### NORTH LAMAR COMBINED NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AREA MEETING

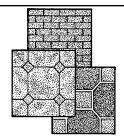
While this study only pertains to the neighborhoods to the south of Braker Lane, you might want to attend just for your own enlightenment on the process. At some point our neighborhood will be asked to take part in our own study.

Mid-Process Open House, Saturday, January 24, 2009, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm, St. Mark United Methodist Church, Fellowship Hall, 601 West Braker Lane, Austin, Texas 78753

Meeting Topics: The mid-process open house will give participants a chance to review topic chapters of the North Lamar Combined Planning Area neighborhood plan, and make comments

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