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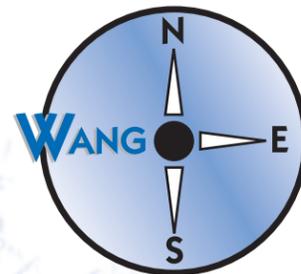
June 2nd, 2003, 7:00 pm

Howson Branch Library

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

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West Austin Neighborhood Group
P.O. Box 5722
Austin, Texas 78763-5722



West Austin Neighborhood Group

Organized 1973

*"To preserve our neighborhood
and protect it from deterioration."*

OFFICERS

Michael Cannatti
President

Susan Pascoe
Past President

Gwen Jewiss
Vice President

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Blake Tollett

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Hon. Will Wynn

NEWSLETTER

Hal Katz
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Linda Dickens
Assistant Editor

Background Photo of Lime Kiln #PICA24140,
Austin History Center, Austin Public Library

THE NEIGHBOR

P.O. Box 5722 • Austin, Texas 78763-5722

May, 2003

**President's Message
May 2003**

Greets all:

**In The Spring, A Young Man's Fancy
Turns To ... Property Taxes!**

If you saw that coming, it's probably because of all the recent events in the state legislature concerning school funding, the City Council debates concerning "gentrification" in East Austin, and the property assessment notices that were mailed out recently announcing another round of higher property appraisals for our neighborhood. With the rising cost of owning property in West Austin, I thought I'd describe some options that are available for you to keep your property taxes down. There are not all that many options available, but here are a few...

Historic Landmark Designation

The most effective way to obtain a substantial tax break is to have your home qualified for historic zoning by the city's Historic Landmark Commission. Historic zoning enables the City Council to designate a building, structure, site, district, area or land of architectural, historical or cultural importance. This process can provide tax incentives while encouraging or requiring certain safeguards and review procedures for any proposed exterior changes. For example, tax abatements are available if you own a property designated as "historic" and use the property as your residence, so that you pay no property tax to the city, county and Austin Community College on your structure, and only half on the land beneath them. If you own a property designated as "historic" and use the property as a business, a 50% tax abatement is applied to the structure.

But this option is not available for everyone. First of all, your structure must qualify for "historic" protection. This usually requires performing historical research at the Austin History Center. In addition, an extensive application must be prepared and submitted to the Historic Landmark Commission. An example of an application is available at the City's web site at www.ci.austin.tx.us/development/downloads/03.doc. Applications for historic zoning

are reviewed by the Historic Landmark Commission, by the Planning Commission and by the City Council. The Historic Landmark Commission may designate a property as "historic" based on a number of criteria, including the historic relevance of previous occupants or the home's architectural significance. Other criteria considered by the City Council are listed at www.ci.austin.tx.us/development/zonginfo1.htm#Historic_Review_Criteria.

But there is a catch. Or in fact, possibly two. First of all, historic buildings are generally more expensive to maintain than the average home, and to keep the historic designation, owners must keep the structure in good condition, submit to annual inspections, and present any changes to the exterior of the structure to the city's Historic Landmark Commission for approval.

The second catch is that the historic designation for one property may add to the housing cost inflation for neighboring properties. This very effect is currently being debated in East Austin, where there is concern that "gentrification" is driving up property values (and therefore property taxes) of adjacent homes, often to the point where the low-income homeowners can't afford to live there because of the rising property tax burden. The same thing can happen to low-income homeowners in West Austin, such as retirees. However, Travis County's chief property tax appraiser announced in January that he will start valuing historic houses apart from neighboring structures, meaning their value will not directly impact a neighborhood's appraisals. That could help erase any impact that historic zoning might have on neighboring properties.

(At one point, the Landmark Commission was working on a proposed ordinance to create local historic districts which would enable neighborhoods to define areas for the City Council to consider eligible for historic designation so that homeowners in that area would then receive the same tax abatement now reserved for individual historic landmarks. I have not been able to determine the status of that ordinance, but will look into it further.)

Protesting Your Property Appraisal

Another effective way to control your property taxes is to protest your property's value to the
continued, next page

Be sure to visit our website at <http://www.deepeddy.com/wang/>!

continued from previous

appraisal review board. This may be the most important right you have as a taxpayer. You may protest if you disagree with any of the actions the appraisal district has taken on your property. You may discuss your concerns about your property value, exemptions, and special appraisal in an informal session with an impartial panel of your fellow citizens, called an appraisal review board (ARB). Most appraisal districts informally review your protest with you to try to solve problems before a formal hearing. INDEED, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR A LOWER PROPERTY VALUE TO BE GRANTED DURING AN INFORMAL REVIEW IF YOU TAKE THE TIME TO CHALLENGE YOUR APPRAISAL IN PERSON AND AGREE TO WAIVE YOUR FORMAL HEARING.

The State provides details about how to protest your property value for property taxes at www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy03.html. For example, you can challenge the appraisal amount if there are any hidden defects, such as a cracked foundation or inadequate plumbing, although you should collect photographs, statements from builders, or independent appraisals to prove the defect exists. You can also search the Travis County database for real estate properties (www.travis-cad.org/search.htm) for appraisal records on similar properties in your area to see if there is a big difference in the values. This information can be used to show that your property wasn't treated equally. You should weigh the costs of preparing a protest against the potential tax savings. Preparing a protest may not be worth the time and expense if it results in only a small tax savings.

You can also challenge the tax assessment if you were denied an exemption, such as a general homestead, over-65, disabled person's, or a disabled veteran's exemption. For the homestead exemption, if the chief appraiser denied a homestead exemption for part of the land around your home, show how much land is used as a yard.

To protest your property appraisal, be sure to file your notice of protest by May 31 or no later than 30 days after the appraisal district delivers a notice of appraised value to you, whichever date is later. For additional information concerning taxpayer's rights, remedies and responsibilities, see www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/remedy03/index.html.

National Register District Protection

Another way to protect property values in West Austin would be to have our neighborhood (or parts of it) qualify as a National Register District in the National Register of Historic Places. This is a federal program for protecting historic properties, and is different from the City's historic landmark designation

program described above.

The National Register of Historic Places was created by Congress in 1966 to serve as a list recognizing historic resources. These resources might be buildings, houses, districts, bridges, objects, landscapes, etc., that have significance to individual communities, regions, states or the nation. While this designation provides very few restrictions on rehabilitation or use of a property in the district unless tax incentives or federal funds are used, there could be certain benefits to the neighborhood, including participating in documenting the nation's significant historic sites. In addition, property owners may be eligible for investment tax credits for rehabilitation if the property is used for income-producing purposes.

If anyone out there has any other ideas about how to keep our property taxes down, please send them to me and I will happily circulate them. And as always, please feel free to contact me on matters of neighborhood concern.

Michael Rocco Cannatti
338-9100
mike@hamiltonterre.com

WANG Executive Committee Meeting Minutes May 5, 2003

Attending Board Members: Michael Cannatti, Albert Almanza, Joyce Basciano, Joe Bennett, Erik Cary, Linda Dickens, Stephen Griffith, Gwen Jewiss, Hal Katz, Kenneth Pfluger, Michael Falk, Selina Serna, and Blake Tollett

Guests: Marcia Edwards and several other neighbors were in attendance.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the April 2003 meeting were approved.

Committee Reports

Zoning

Good Shepherd Church—Marcia Edwards reports that the Windsor-Exposition Neighborhood Group ("WENG") continues to negotiate with the Good Shepherd Church. Good Shepherd Church requested a postponement of its variance request until June 10, 2003. The Church is requesting a variance relating to impervious cover.

Norwalk and 2502 West 7th Street – Blake Tollett reports that based upon his research the planned development for a Montessori School would not require a change in zoning, but only a conditional use permit. Michael Cannatti remarked that the

executive committee's prior 6-4 vote at the last meeting does not reflect an opposition to the school, but rather an opposition to a change in zoning. Mike further noted that the vote would likely change if a conditional use permit could be obtained without a change in zoning.

Communications

It was noted that we might be able to have the Annual Social in the fall at either Laguna Gloria after its re-opening or at the Bauer house.

Liaison

A discussion was had about the Old West Austin Neighborhood Association's (OWANA) procedure for sending a letter to those who become involved in expressing an opinion as to a variance or zoning change.

Membership Committee

Committee members expressed concern about the neighborhood group's persistent low membership. Ken Pfluger discussed his ideas for increasing membership.

Transportation Committee

No report.

Historic Preservation Committee

Joe Bennett reports that the Old West Austin Historic District (OWAHD) gained approval by the Texas Historical Commission last week in an 8-0 vote before its board. Joe explained some of the procedures and noted that our neighborhood has the potential to have an even larger number of involved homes.

Infrastructure

It was noted that a meeting was had between City staff and Susan Pascoe, Joyce Basciano, and Michael Cannatti regarding neighborhood plans.

Nominating

A discussion was had concerning potential new executive committee members.

Bylaws

No report.

Treasurer's Report

It was reported that the checking account balance is \$3,625.51; savings account balance is \$3,172.22; oak wilt account's balance is \$1,194.57, and paid membership is currently at 231, excluding 68 recently expired members.

Join WANG

1 Year Anniversary Party

* Benefit for bathhouse renovation *

* Bathhouse renovation plans will be unveiled

Saturday, June 7th, 5 - 9pm
Deep Eddy Pool

401 Deep Eddy Dr. (off Lake Austin Blvd., just West of MOPAC)

Food • Beverages • Live Music

Austin Angelfish Synchronized Swim Team and Fire Spinners!

Tony's Home Service

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