

**Liveable City Community News
April 2008**

In this Issue:

Affordable Housing Candidate Forum

2008 Vision Awards

New Liveable City Advisory Council

Transforming Middle Schools

LC Incentive Study Update

Bikes in a Car Culture

Neighborhoods and Schools

Shout Outs

**Affordable Housing: City Council Candidate Forum
Friday, April 4
5:30 - 7:30pm
Scholz's Beer Garden, 1607 San Jacinto Boulevard**

Austin's rapidly vanishing supply of affordable housing is one of the most critical issues facing our city today – which makes this Friday's Candidate Forum one of the most important of the election season. Hear what City Council candidates have to say about keeping Austin affordable for all people, including how to manage the 55 million dollar bond package passed by voters in November 2006 and how - or whether - to provide incentive packages. The forum is sponsored by HousingWorks Austin, the Austin CHDO Roundtable and Women in Housing. Food and drink are on your own. The discussion is free – and priceless. For more on housing issues, see <http://www.housingworksAustin.org/>

You're Invited! 2008 Liveable Vision Awards

Mark your calendars now for Liveable City's annual Vision Awards party, Wednesday, May 21, 6pm-7:30pm, at the Carver Museum, 1161 Angelina. In keeping with the vision theme, we'll be looking at the big Es this year: Economics, Environment, Equity, Engagement and Esthetics. Expect schmoozing par excellence, wonderful nibbles from Big Night Out, wine from Glazer's, and friends galore. Tickets and sponsorships will be available soon. Check www.liveablecity.org for details or call Wendi at 326-3332.

More Brains, More Better: Liveable City Launches New Advisory Council

Liveable City recently embarked on a fresh venture in community engagement with the launch of our new Liveable City Advisory Council. Bringing together thoughtful, imaginative and experienced community leaders, the Advisory Council is intended to engage a wider group in developing effective solutions and policies that will result in a more livable city for all of Austin.

The new Advisory Council will be led by tri-chairs Ann Graham, arts advocate and founding executive director of First Night Austin; Jay Reddy, Planning Commissioner and prominent member of Austin's technology community; and Danny Roth, guiding light behind the Penn Field redevelopment and the new Seaholm project. Charter members of the Advisory Council reflect a diverse range of expertise and experience on the many critical issues facing Austin today (click here for membership).

We expect the Advisory Council to grow over the coming months and look forward to the contributions of this new group in broadening and enriching our public conversation.

The Awkward Age: Transforming Austin's Middle Schools

Though Austin boasts some outstanding public elementary and high schools, our city's middle schools have long been acknowledged as the weakest link in the AISD system. In response, the district is now engaged an ambitious new community effort to turn what some view as the purgatory years into an exciting and successful time for Austin students.

Under the leadership of Associate Superintendent Paul Cruz, the middle school initiative marks a new willingness to engage the community in finding solutions, a welcome change from AISD's traditional top-down management style. The project began in late January with an intensive three-day task force of community leaders and educators, including Allen Weeks who was honored by Liveable City last year as a leader of the successful St. John Community effort to save Webb Middle School from closing (<http://liveablecity.org/LCSecure/LVA2007/>).

During a marathon 32-hour process, the task force identified eight major strategies for improvements, now in the hands of eight community Action Teams, who will hammer out detailed plans for each by late spring. Liveable City is ably represented on the middle school Action Teams by board members Dr. Kevin Foster and Susan Moffat, both active members of Liveable City's Education Committee. For more about the Middle Level Education Plan, see <http://www.austinisd.org/schools/ms/>

Liveable City To Release Incentives Study By End of April

From the outside, Austin's remarkable economic growth over the past three decades is viewed with awe. But for many who live here, it is not clear where Austin's economic development strategy comes from, how it is implemented, or what institutions and actors shape our economic development policies and programs. Recently these broad economic

concerns have coalesced around the issue of City incentives. Why should public tax resources should be given to private firms? How much are we giving? And what are we getting in return?

In response to such concerns, Liveable City has commissioned a comprehensive study to help us understand the role incentives play in our larger economic landscape. Helmed by noted UT economist and planner Dr. Michael Oden, the long-awaited report and policy recommendations will be released by the end of April.

The Spokin' Word: Making Way for Bikes in a Car Culture

If you're the two-wheeling type, you know it's only become scarier out there as car traffic increases on Austin roadways. Sadly, the very thing that could help fix this problem - getting more folks out of their cars and onto bikes - will remain elusive unless we can fix some of the very real safety issues that keep many of us from choosing our bicycles as a healthy alternative to fossil-fueled transport. With this in mind, the City of Austin is updating its Bike Plan to better integrate bikes into our overall transportation picture. Review the bike plan online at <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/bicycle/> - then send your comments to the city bike coordinator at Nadia.Barrera@ci.austin.tx.us.

Update: Community Committee on Neighborhoods & Schools

The Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools (CCNS) has wrapped up its public outreach phase and is now transforming what members characterize as a “wealth of great input” into concrete recommendations about processes and policies for major decisions affecting our public schools. The committee posted its draft recommendations in early March for public review, followed by a community meeting on March 25th to gather more comments. After revisions based on this feedback, the final report will head to the AISD Board of Trustees in late April.

Liveable City is represented on the CCNS by Susan Moffat and Jim Walker, both members of LC's Education Committee, which pushed for the creation of the CCNS, along with other community members. Read Liveable City's recommendations on rebuilding trust in AISD at www.liveablecity.org. For details on the committee, see <http://www.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/ccns>.

Shout Outs:

- To LC board member Jim Walker on being named “Austinite of the Year Under 40” by the Young Men's Business League and the Young Women's Alliance. Currently chairing Envision Central Texas, Jim is the Executive Director of the Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project.

- To Lee Walker who's stepping down after years of distinguished service as Chair of the Cap Metro board.
- To leading renewable energy proponent Roger Duncan on taking the reins of Austin Energy as its new general manager.
- To County Commissioner Sarah Eckhardt for leading the charge to make Travis the first Texas county to go "Sweat Free" by pledging to use county dollars only for goods purchased from vendors who maintain safe and legal operations.