

Liveable City Community News
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Back to School in the Neighborhood

In recent years, some of Austin's biggest firestorms have been sparked by the threat of closing neighborhood schools. A few neighborhoods have fought back and succeeded in keeping their schools, at least for the time being; others have not been so lucky. But win or lose, most folks agreed they felt blind-sided by the district's decision. Where were the early warnings? Where was the public process? What factors did the district use to decide which schools stayed open and which didn't?

After public nudging by several community groups, including Liveable City, the AISD board voted last spring to create the Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools (CCNS). The group's charge is to develop recommendations, with broad public input, on standard policies and procedures for identifying and reviewing schools the district characterizes as "underutilized." Put another way, the job is to create a plan that prevents future blind-siding of neighborhoods, increases transparency and gives the public a stronger voice *before* the district's decision is made.

The committee held its first meeting in May and has spent the past two months learning about what factors can cause a school to be “repurposed,” AISD’s preferred euphemism for closure (in essence, these are low enrollment or failing TAKS score). The committee will gather public input during August and September, and is expected to present draft recommendations for public review in mid-November. Final recommendations will be sent to the AISD board in February 2008.

Liveable City is represented on the CCNS by board members Susan Moffat and Jim Walker, both members of LC’s own Education Committee, which pushed for the creation of the CCNS. All CCNS meetings are open to the public. To learn more, visit <http://www.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/ccns/>

Just the Facts: Travis County on Immigrants

As the national debate on immigration roils on, it’s hard to know where fact ends and fiction begins. So it’s especially timely that Travis County has weighed in with a well-researched report, 2006–2007 Travis County Immigrant Assessment. Over the last 15 years, Travis County experienced a 230% growth in foreign-born residents, jumping from 45,000 in 1990 to 148,000 in 2005. But what do these numbers really mean on the ground? The report’s goal is to provide a “balanced, accurate and useful picture of foreign-born residents in Travis County” and some of its findings may surprise you. Get the full story at this link:

http://www.co.travis.tx.us/health_human_services/research_planning/immigrant_assessment.asp

Create Austin Moves Ahead

Despite the dog days, work continues apace on Create Austin, a community-wide plan to encourage and sustain our town’s vibrant cultural life. In the making since 2005, CA began an exhaustive participatory phase last winter, with community meetings, online surveys and no fewer than six – count ‘em six – task forces. By late June, task force members had distilled a batch of recommendations, now being plumped into shape as a first draft of the Create Austin plan. That draft will be presented for more public feedback at

meetings scheduled for October 15–17. Hats off to all who continue to toil on this effort, including Liveable City board members Ann Kitchen, Michael Oden and Mark Yznaga, as well as LC board alum Lydia Ortiz. For details, see <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/culturalplan/default.htm> .

A Little DAP'II Do You: Downtown Update

Meanwhile, in another part of the forest, work also continues on the Downtown Austin Plan (DAP). The city and its consulting team, led by ROMA Design Group, have spent the better part of this rainy summer seeking input from citizens and stakeholders, including Liveable City. Preliminary findings are expected this fall in the form of a discussion draft, which will again make the rounds of interested parties. The final plan will spell out a comprehensive vision for Downtown, along with the best strategies to make it happen – the latter a sticky wicket, indeed, as so many of its precursors are still sitting on the shelf. Learn more at <http://www.downtownaustinplan.org/>.

Still Time to Join the Kill-A-Watt Challenge...

As a proud community supporter of the Kill-A-Watt Challenge, LC wants to remind you that it's not too late to join. Since May, this green throw-down has challenged individuals, neighborhoods and businesses to see who can reduce their energy use the most this summer. Sponsored by the Austin Chronicle and Austin Energy, the challenge offers monthly prizes and website recognition for winners. If you hurry, you can still get in on the final month. Read the rules and enter at www.austinchronicle.com/watt.

Summer Reading from the LC Stacks

If you're looking for a bit of perspective on our current growing pains, an excellent place to start is Anthony Orum's Power, Money and the People: The Making of Modern Austin (Texas Monthly Press, 1987). Sadly, it's out of print, but recycled copies are readily available on Amazon.com. Or

try the shelves at our local hero, Half Price Books, and/or your neighborhood library.

For some heavier lifting, don't forget the City of Austin proposed budget, available online at http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/budget/07-08/downloads/20070607_budgetpres_budget_policies.pdf

And now, a word for our Sponsors...

Building a more Liveable City ain't cheap! Special recognition goes to the Shield-Ayers Foundation and the Rather Family Trust, whose generous help makes our work possible. For a complete list of our wonderful partners and supporters, please visit <http://liveablecity.org/LCSecure/LVA2007/>

Join us! Do you care about keeping Austin liveable for everyone? Become a member today at www.liveablecity.org.

We also welcome your comments or suggestions - email us at news@liveablecity.org or call us at 512.326.3331.