

Liveable City Community News January 2009

In This Issue:

Common Sense Change for School Accountability

Zero Waste...Or Darn Close!

Resolution: A More Livable City for 2009

Take the Downtown Survey Today

Package Transportation Requests

Is Austin Ready for Comprehensive Planning?

Taxes, Budgets, and the Year Ahead

Homestead Preservation Goes to Council

Shout Outs:

Obama yes!

The Asian Year of the Ox Arrives

And now, a word for our Sponsors...

COMMON SENSE CHANGE FOR SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY:

www.savetexaschools.com To Launch February 1

Last year, Austin's Johnston High School made impressive double digit gains in student test scores, retained a dedicated hard-working faculty and rallied widespread community support – only to be closed under Texas' school "accountability" laws. Though Education Commissioner Robert Scott agreed to keep the school open under a new name and to limit the wholesale reassignment of teachers and students, the episode underscored the folly of a state system that focuses on punitive school closures, tossing aside demonstrable progress as irrelevant.

With Reagan High School now on the same chopping block, Liveable City's Education Committee has joined with a group of community leaders in an all-out effort to fix Texas' school accountability law. The "Stand Up for Reagan" Community Action Team will focus on three common-sense goals, in line with those of other statewide education groups:

- **Have one accountability system, not two.** Aligning the Texas system to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) rules would save millions now spent to assess and maintain two different sets of records - and give our schools a better chance to improve.
- **Make the law diagnostic, not punitive.** An effective accountability system should provide useful diagnoses and resources for improvement, not force wasteful and traumatic school closures mainly in low-income areas as current law does.
- **Focus on improvement.** Texas should adopt a growth model to measure and reward student improvement over time, as other states have done. Texas' current high-stakes system punishes kids and schools if even a few students in one sub-group miss a single standard on one-day test.

Draft legislation on these issues is expected in the next few weeks. Starting February 1st, you can get involved at the group's new website - www.savetexaschools.com.

ZERO WASTE...OR DARN CLOSE!

January 5th marked the kickoff of an ambitious new regional initiative - the Central Texas Zero Waste Alliance. This fresh coalition aims to take "reduce, reuse, recycle" to a whole new level, educating the public and policymakers about ways to curb trash and advocating for zero waste initiatives, green jobs and a more sustainable local economy. The group has hit the ground running, mustering critical support for the new Zero Waste Strategic Plan, which passed on a unanimous vote by City Council January 15th.

If its first meeting is any indication, the Alliance has already succeeded in reaching beyond the usual enviro suspects, including representatives from local churches, AISD and the San Marcos Chamber of Commerce. To join this effort or learn more about future meetings and actions, please email robin@texasenvironment.org.

RESOLUTION: A MORE LIVABLE CITY IN 2009

The New Year celebrations may be behind us, but it's not too late to become a Liveable City member for 2009! Your support is especially important as Austin and our nation face tougher economic times. On a variety of issues that affect our daily lives, Liveable City works to ensure that public policies reflect solid research, open public process, and best practices that benefit all Austin families.

Your Liveable City membership will help fund groundbreaking studies, including new initiatives to promote a sustainable local economy and keep Austin livable for all. Memberships are available for every budget and you may direct your gift to specific goals or projects. We'll keep you connected through our regular newsletter and our "Imagining the Next City" Forums. Members joining at the

Sustaining level or higher also receive complimentary admission to our annual Vision Awards.

Learn more and join today at www.liveablecity.org.

Taxes, Budgets, and the Year Ahead

Take the Downtown Survey Today

Downtown Austin Form and Character Districts Survey

<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/default.htm>

Is Austin Ready for Comprehensive Planning?

http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/zoning/com_plan.htm

Homestead Preservation Goes to Council

https://www.ci.austin.tx.us/council_meetings/item_attachments.cfm?meetingid=150&itemid=9194&item=114

Recommendations for CAMPO

Thursday, January 15, 2009

https://www.ci.austin.tx.us/council_meetings/item_attachments.cfm?meetingid=159&itemid=9416&item=30

Shout Outs:

- Obama, Obama! Inauguration Day drew millions together in pride and joy as our new president took the oath of office. Now let's roll up our sleeves and help the dude get it done.
- To the Asian Year of the Ox, which comes trundling in sometime between January 26 and February 4th, depending on your calendar. Look for this hardworking beast to help clean up the chaos left by the departing Rat year. But no free rides – the Ox says play by the rules and do your part, good advice any day of the week.

And now, a word for our Sponsors...

Building a more Liveable City isn't cheap! Special recognition goes to the Shield-Ayers Foundation, the Rather Family Trust, the Trull Foundation, and the Greater

Houston Family Foundation's Gray Family Fund whose generous help makes our work possible. For a complete list of our wonderful partners and supporters, please visit www.liveablecity.org