

Liveable City Community News

November 2008

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You're Invited! Liveable City's Holiday Party, Wednesday, December 10, 6pm-8pm, at the Palm Door, 401 Sabine

Please join us for a festive evening at Liveable City's Holiday Party, Wednesday, December 10, 6pm-8pm, at the Palm Door, 401 Sabine. Catch up with friends and get a peek at Austin's newest party venue, located in the heart of the entertainment district a stone's throw from the Convention Center (parking is available in the Convention Center garage right across the street). Since its inception as a cabinet factory, the Palm Door's rustic building has housed many well-known Austin businesses and was former home to the City Grill. Mark your calendar now for December 10th and join us to check out the stylish restoration.

Good food, good drink and great company guaranteed! For more on the Palm Door, visit www.palmdoor.com.

LC's Annual Membership Drive – Sign Up Online or at the Holiday Party!

Just a friendly reminder that it's time to help keep Austin livable for all by renewing your annual Liveable City membership at a level that's comfortable for you. Your support of LC helps build a shared and sustainable future for our city, funding work in such critical areas as affordable housing, independent local business, public education, renewable energy, transportation, and urban and regional planning. Current projects that will directly benefit from your support include LC's soon-to-be released transportation funding study, our "Imagining the Next City" Speakers Series, and more.

Want to do more than just re-up? Learn about our new Leadership Circle, which provides the opportunity for ongoing support at a higher level.

www.liveablecity.org.

Your support of Liveable City's nonpartisan, nonprofit work helps provide policy analysis, best practices research, civic education, and public strategy support to community building groups across Austin. Re-up or circle up today at www.liveablecity.org

LC Report Spurs Council Reform of Economic Incentive Policies

This week LC Board members Michael Oden and Robin Rather and Advisory Council member Sean Garretson met with City Council Members Laura Morrison, Randi Shade, and Lee Leffingwell and others to discuss needed changes to Austin's economic incentive policies. Following on the heels of the narrow loss of the Stop Domain Subsidies Proposition 2, the meeting covered recommendations raised in LC's report on Austin's incentive policies, *Building a More Sustainable Economy: Economic Development Strategy and Public Incentives in Austin*, available at www.liveablecity.org.

LC Board members stressed the need for more transparency, improved cost-benefit analysis, and meaningful public participation in Austin's incentive process, as well as a focus on the larger goal of building a sustainable green economy. Look for preliminary Council action soon on these important

issues.

Stand Up for Reagan High School: Saturday, November 22, 2:30pm, State Capitol

Facing possible closure under Texas' punitive school "accountability" laws, Reagan High School students will lead a march and rally this Saturday, November 22, 2:30pm-4:30pm at Capitol. Speakers will include Rep. Dawnna Dukes and AISD Trustee Cheryl Bradley, as well as Reagan student leaders who will outline positive steps the state could take if they're serious about helping schools and students succeed.

The rally is sponsored by the "Stand Up" Club at Reagan, Austin Voices for Education and Youth, Reagan PTSA and alumni, as well as the Reagan Community Action Team, which is developing a position paper on needed changes in the state's school accountability law. For more information on this effort, please contact Melissa Rosser at melissa.rosser@house.state.tx.us.

Reviewing CAMPO'S Peer Review

As transit wonks know, CAMPO - the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization - is the transportation planning body for Williamson, Travis and Hays Counties. Established in 1973 and governed by the [Transportation Policy Board](#) of state, regional and local officials, CAMPO has made decisions over the last several decades that have created the transportation system Central Texans live with today.

The CAMPO Board recently engaged Cambridge Systematics to perform a Peer Review Study of Capitol Metro to assess the agency's planning, governance, and funding mechanisms. Their report, available today, makes findings and preliminary recommendations with the goal of improving our region's transportation system. This review is expected to be formally presented to the CAMPO board in early December for public comment so interested parties should begin their homework now.

Download the full CAMPO Peer Review report and the accompanying presentation at www.campotexas.org/comm_peer-review_agendas.php.

How's Austin Weathering the Downturn? Get the Facts from the Community Action Network

The Community Action Network (CAN) is a collaboration of public, private and nonprofit organizations working to achieve sustainable social, health, educational and economic well-being for the people of Central Texas. Twice a year, CAN publishes a Community Conditions report that covers a multitude of areas related to livability for our region.

CAN's recent Fall 2008 Community Conditions report offers a wealth of facts and figures for anyone wondering how Central Texans are weathering the economic storm. A few sobering nuggets:

- In the 2007-2008 school year, 62% of AISD students were economically disadvantaged (up from 47% in 1999) and 22% had a limited English proficiency (up from 17% in 1999).
- Overall, the median household income in Travis County has declined by 9% (\$5,259) between 1999 and 2007.
- In 2008, layoffs in Travis County reached the highest level that the Bureau of Labor Statistics had ever recorded for the month of August since they began collecting layoff data in 1995.

Download the full report at
http://www.caction.org/community_conditions/Fall_2008.pdf.

Around the Corner: A New Way to Pay for Roads and Rails?

Central Texas taxpayers might be surprised to learn that the 2009 Legislative Session may include bills to create new Regional Transportation Districts across parts of Texas. Conceived as a way to fund new road and rail projects, the ideas under discussion could allow regional districts to hold county-based local option elections to levy property taxes, increase fees for car registration or local gasoline taxes, or enact a variety of other new revenue streams. Begun in North Texas by rail supporters, the concept is now being embraced by road advocates to supplement dwindling highway dollars and unpopular toll roads.

Will Central Texans vote to increase taxes for transportation in a recession? Will the new dollars be used for rail or roads? This proposal promises to raise questions - and major fireworks - in the future. For a better idea of how this funding could work, go to Rail North Texas's interactive Revenue Options Worksheet at <http://www.nctcog.org/trans/transit/planning/rnt/index.asp>.

City Down with the Dumps

Residents of Northeast Austin and environmental leaders were recently shocked to learn that city staff had signed an agreement with BFI Waste Systems to allow expansion of a long-opposed trash dump north of Highway 290 on Giles Road. Signed without a public hearing or Council vote, this staff-generated action will allow the current dump to rise to a height higher than Mount Bonnell. Beyond a bigger trash pile, the new agreement also raises serious questions about transparency in government, Council oversight of staff, and adherence to well-established community values.

For a blow-by-blow on the whole mess, see the Austin Chronicle's piece by Wells Dunbar at Texas Campaign for the Environment.

http://www.texasenvironment.org/news_story.cfm?IID=630.

This is certainly not the last trash talk we'll be hearing on this story.

Shout Outs!

To newly-elected Precinct Three County Commissioner Elect Karen Huber. With her support for managed growth and balanced transportation, she'll be welcome addition to the Travis County Courthouse.

To Austin voters for voting early (50% before election day) and often (a robust turnout city-wide) to express their choice for a new direction for our country and community.

To President-Elect Barack Obama for helping us believe in a new day for all Americans. Now let's roll up our sleeves and help him get us there.

See you at the Palm Door for Liveable City's Holiday Party on Dec. 10th!

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.

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