

Liveable City  
Community News  
November 2010

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**Liveable City Holiday Bash**

Monday, December 6, 5:30pm-8pm

Black Star Coop Pub & Brewery

<http://www.blackstar.coop/>

Just a reminder to mark your calendars for Liveable City’s annual Holiday Bash, Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 5:30pm-8pm, at the new Black Star Coop Pub & Brewery, located on the Red Line in Crestview Station at North Lamar & Airport Boulevard.

Catch up with old friends and meet new ones, sample luscious complimentary appetizers, or hoist a frosty beverage at the cash bar. Watch trains cruise by from your perch in Black Star’s modern glass interior *and* get a jump on your holiday shopping at our festive silent auction.

The annual Holiday Bash is also a great time to join or renew your Liveable City membership. As a member, you’ll be eligible to nominate folks for this spring’s 2011 Liveable Vision Awards – and we’ll be kicking off the nominations with a special table at the Holiday Bash so please start thinking about those deserving local heroes now.

Liveable City’s ready to celebrate. Save the date and we’ll see you at Blackstar on December 6<sup>th</sup>!

**Real Data, Real Improvement:**

**Superintendent Sets Record Straight on AISD Teacher Quality**

Last year, Reagan High School students improved by a jaw-dropping 26 percentage points on the science Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test and 23 percentage points in math. Similarly, LBJ High School students showed a 20% improvement on the math TAKS, and a 19% increase for science. Best of all, these numbers represented true gains, achieved *without* applying the controversial Texas Projection Measure (TPM).

Given such progress, AISD Superintendent Meria Carstarphen was understandably steamed when a recent study by the Association of Texas Professional Educators claimed “teacher inequality” east of I-35, implying the current administration has continued a pattern of historical neglect, an impression reinforced by the *Austin American-Statesman’s* front page coverage.

Responding in a *Statesman* guest op ed this week, Dr. Carstarphen ably rebutted key elements of ATPE report, noting the following flawed data and omissions:

- The study assumed that any teacher who hasn't yet attained full certification is teaching "out of field." By this definition, a NASA engineer with an entry-level license is teaching science "out of field."
- Study data showed Lanier High School with more than 24 percent of its teachers "out of field" when the correct number is less than 1 percent. Similarly, Reagan HS was shown with 19 percent of teachers “out of field,” when in fact none are.
- The study assumed that teachers who attend traditional, university-based programs are more effective than those who pursued alternative certification, when local and national research on this topic shows virtually no difference.
- Finally, study authors inexplicably failed to include student achievement as a measure in assessing teacher quality.

The real bottom line? Even in Austin's lowest-performing high schools, “teacher quality” was significantly greater than the "quality" of teachers in the highest-performing Texas districts – as the recent leaps in Reagan and LBJ test scores show.

AISD students are making real progress and misleading headlines that undercut that effort don't help. Next time, we encourage ATPE and others to double-check the data before they go public.

Read Dr. Carstarphen's full editorial here:

[http://www.austinisd.org/inside/superintendent/docs/supt\\_Teacher\\_Quality\\_Op-Ed\\_20101029.pdf](http://www.austinisd.org/inside/superintendent/docs/supt_Teacher_Quality_Op-Ed_20101029.pdf)

**Let's Make a Deal:**

**Latest Domain Perks May Lead to More Transparency in City Zoning Cases**

Last summer, the owners of The Domain luxury center came to the city with three zoning requests to adjust conditions under the project's ongoing \$37.5M tax incentive deal. In exchange for an impervious cover swap, the right to delay construction of a promised park, and permission to waive the city's Big Box ordinance, Domain reps offered up a list of improvements to make The Domain more bicycle friendly.

As it turned out, many of the proposed bike improvements were already required under City code. Yet the background material for city decision-makers made it impossible to tell the difference between bona fide new benefits and those which, in the words of one opponent, were "like when your parents wrap up the socks they were going to buy you anyway and pretend they're a Christmas present." Once the proposals were pulled for discussion, public hearings revealed other problems with bus routes, heritage trees and wheelchair access – none of which figured in the Domain's original pitch.

After a three-month slog, primarily led by LC Vice Chair and Big Box vet Susan Moffat, the City Council finally had a deal it felt comfortable with, including nailed-down language on restrictive covenants, heritage tree preservation, Capital Metro bus routes, the timing and quality of the bike improvements, and wheelchair access. But the inefficiency of the process led Moffat to recommend creating a simple chart for future zoning cases to clearly show any concessions or benefits at a glance.

Council Member Laura Morrison quickly took the lead on this concept and, with the support of Domain rep Steve Drenner and key Planning Commissioners, will convene a small working group to hash out a first draft. Expect a full round of public process before any such chart is approved – but if it succeeds, it'll be a win for both sides: a speedier process for developers and a clearer assessment of trade-offs for citizens and policymakers.

**20 Minutes to Decide the Future:  
Last Call for "Imagine Austin" Survey!**  
<http://www.imagineaustin.net>

How do *you* think Austin should handle future growth? Learn about on-the-ground impacts of four possible growth scenarios, then weigh in with your choice on the Imagine Austin survey at <http://www.imagineaustin.net>.

Survey results will guide Austin's Comprehensive Plan so every voice matters. It'll take just twenty minutes of your time (less if you're already a planning geek), but please act soon - the survey closes November 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Join or Renew for 2011!**  
**Liveable City: Your Public Voice for Sanity, Equity & Sustainability**  
<http://www.liveablecity.org/about/membership/>

Do you care about keeping Austin livable for everyone? Now more than ever, we must work to shape and preserve the city our children and grandchildren will inherit – a sustainable city with equity and opportunity for every member of our community.

Liveable City works to address Austin's long-term social, environmental, and economic needs while educating and empowering residents to improve the quality of life for all. Dedicated to civic engagement, Liveable City researches public policy, works to implement best practices, and provides strategy support to community building groups.

Liveable City's project priorities include affordable housing, education, open government, independent local businesses, transportation, renewable energy, health care, and city and regional planning. Throughout the year, we work to ensure equitable opportunities for everyone across our diverse and growing community.

You can play an active role in this effort by becoming a member of Liveable City at a level that is meaningful for you.

Join or renew your LC membership today at <http://www.liveablecity.org/about/membership/>

### **Shout Outs:**

- To Austin voters for passing the first balanced transportation bond ever with an historic mix of road, pedestrian and bike improvements. Let's hope this multi-modal approach sets the template for future bonds!
- To Central Texas for winning a \$3.7 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. The HUD money will help underwrite a new initiative by the Capital Area Council of Governments of Austin to build economic competitiveness by connecting housing with good jobs, quality schools and transportation.
- To our neighbors in Hays and Elgin counties who voted to bring Austin Community College to their districts. Projected to open in 2013, the new ACC campuses will provide affordable college access to a growing number of Central Texas students.