

OWANA

NEWSLETTER ❖ March 2002
www.main.org/owana

OWANA comprises the area from Town Lake to Enfield Road and from Lamar Blvd. to MoPac

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION MEETING

Tuesday, March 5, 7:00 p.m.
Mathews School Cafeteria

OWANA is a neighborhood association, not a homeowners association. Renters, homeowners and businesses are all welcome to participate.

OWANA has a steering committee of 13 members who meet monthly and handle most of the routine concerns. There are four general meetings each year, in the spring, summer, fall and winter. These meetings are open to everyone.

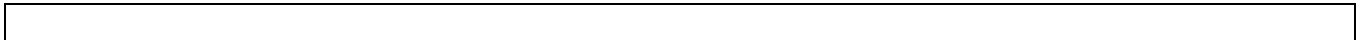
There are several committees, such as Parks, Historic Preservation, Neighborhood Planning, etc., that always need participants. There are also many functional tasks that persons with limited time can do, such as membership recruiting, membership data base maintenance, liaison with other local groups, newsletter content and publishing, and advertising.

Membership for households or businesses is only \$15 a year. A form is on the back of this newsletter or, better yet, join at the meeting.

AGENDA

**Old West Austin Neighborhood Association
Tuesday, March 5, 2002
Mathews Elementary School Cafeteria
7:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

- 1. Nominations and election of three Steering Committee vacancies**
- 2. Committee/Constitution and call for volunteers**
- 3. Treasurer's Report**
- 4. MoNac Update**
- 5. Discussion of issues re: West Austin Park**



What Could the Parks Director Be Thinking . . . By Daniel Traverso*

Some months ago signs appeared in West Austin Park and Mary Baylor (Clarksville) Park, announcing that the fields were dedicated for the use of West Austin Youth Association or the Western Hills Little League. These very tiny parks in Old West Austin, one of the densest neighborhoods in the inner city, are public parks that have long been used by residents of Clarksville and Old West Austin who can walk to them and by the general public. They have never been privatized, but apparently a bureaucrat had decided that they would be.

Jesus Olivares, the city's parks director, decided to dedicate usage of these parks at certain regular times to WAYA and Western Hills Little League, certainly good athletic organizations that provide many benefits to their members, but nevertheless *private* organizations. WAYA hadn't approached the city for the parks. Olivares initiated the conversation and made this decision without conducting any traffic study for either park, and even more significantly, without consulting or notifying the neighbors or the neighborhood association. In fact, Olivares was making these arrangements without including the neighborhood *at the very time* neighborhood residents were spending *hundreds* of hours working in the city Planning Department's long formal process to develop a neighborhood plan. That plan specifies uses for our little neighborhood parks that are very different from what Parks Director Olivares envisioned. Why was Olivares able to make a decision completely independent of the neighborhood planning process? What then was the point of the process whose plan City Council had passed in ordinance form and told us had the force of law? And why did the majority of City Council members fail to respond to our phone calls or mail when we voiced concerns after we became aware of PARD's plans?

When West Austin Park's reservation for WAYA activities was discussed at the December OWANA general meeting (which by the way Mr. Olivares refused to attend, but instead sent a representative who was unable to answer most of our questions), a vote was taken to see if members supported changing park use to accommodate organized WAYA activities. Ten abstained, thirty-two opposed, and only one voted in favor. Also, OWANA mailed or otherwise made available surveys to neighbors to get neighborhood input on dedicating park usage to WAYA. More than 114 surveys were returned, with the overwhelming majority, 91 respondents, expressing opposition to dedication of park use to organized WAYA programs.

Residents expressed their worry about the terrible parking and traffic problems these regular uses would cause when dozens of cars come to these parks at the peak traffic time after work, where streets are already narrow and congested and there is no off-street parking. People also expressed

resentment that regular activities of a private organization would keep neighbors and their children from using these popular parks, and during the very after-school and after-work hours or Saturdays when neighbors most frequently use the parks. Some also raised the issue that the general public would be shut out of parks by dedication of this public resource to a private organization whose membership includes a large number of Westlake residents. Olivares stated recently in the newspaper that he thought parks should be for children and families. We think parks should serve children, families, singles – everybody.

Rumor had it that WAYA officials said they would not exercise PARD's invitation to dedicate park usage for their private use if the residents didn't want these regularly scheduled athletic programs in the park. It was obvious that an incredible majority of the neighborhood didn't favor changing the traditional use of the parks. On Tuesday February 19, 2002 an OWANA representative met with WAYA leadership and was told that WAYA was pulling out of the parks, signage was removed from Mary Baylor Park, and WAYA promised a letter would be forthcoming to OWANA's Chair of their decision. We all appreciate WAYA's sensitivity to the wishes of the majority of the neighborhood and applaud their decision. Too bad that PARD isn't nearly as sensitive or reasonable.

This is a no-win situation for the Parks and Recreation Dept., who many residents view as having acted arrogantly and high-handed. Parents don't want to leave with the kids in search of parks they can use instead of using the parks in their neighborhoods. Perhaps this points out that PARD and Council need to think about how to create more parkland and facilities if they want to support this kind of "public-private" activity. Otherwise the public loses.

Making the situation worse, Olivares has had his park police conducting sweeps on West Austin Park for some months, resulting in a few tickets for leash law violations being given. How much does it cost taxpayers to have cops staking out our little park like some big-time drug bust? Has it warranted patrol cars speeding through the neighborhood? Does some motorist or pedestrian have to be injured before they realize the insanity of high speed chase tactics for a possible misdemeanor citation? Most recently a neighbor was manhandled and arrested for alleged dogs off leash, though witnesses saw the dogs leashed. These police tactics to enforce a class C misdemeanor shock the public and question the judgment of Olivares's ability to run a multimillion-dollar department that has police powers.

Acting City Manager Tobi Futrell and PARD director Olivares have asked to address the upcoming OWANA general membership meeting at Mathews Elementary at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, March 5th. We have invited them. Let's hope many neighbors attend and are able to get straight answers to these and other questions put to these bureaucrats. * See note on the following page.

Steering Committee Nominees

Three nominees for vacancies on the Steering Committee are:

Teresa Perez-Wiseley 909 Theresa, 476-9808

Paul Dunham 604 Highland Ave., 626-0016

Sarah Uribe 1105 Elm St., 482-8441

The Steering Committee typically has vacancies during the year. New Steering Committee members must be voted in by the general membership during general meetings. If you are interested, you might start by attending the monthly Steering Committee meetings (they are open to OWANA members) to learn about current events and the "process". As a vacancy occurs, you can be nominated to fill it. Floor nominations are always accepted at meetings and self nominations are encouraged.

The entire Steering Committee is nominated and elected every December. Frequently, past members agree to serve another year. There is a three year limit to service.

The Steering Committee is considering staggered two year terms. The Steering Committee would like to hear your views on whether you would be more likely to serve a one-year term or a two year term.

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The article on page 2 by Daniel Traverso expresses the opinion of the writer, and not necessarily the opinion of the OWANA Steering Committee or the OWANA membership.

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New OWANA Officers

The new OWANA officers are:

Chair – Margaret Bruch
Margaret served on the Steering Committee during the middle 90's

Vice Chair – Mike Whisenhunt
Mike has been our webmaster.

Secretary – Laura Morrison
Laura is cochair of the Historic Designation Committee

Treasurer – Catherine Crago
Katie is our representative to the West End Austin Alliance

Join us in supporting these individuals who have generously offered their time and energy to serve as officers of our Steering Committee.

Old West Austin Neighborhood Association Membership

Annual dues are only \$15 per household or business.
You may also join in person at the general meeting.

Name _____

Address _____

E-mail _____

Phone _____

Mail to: OWANA
 P.O. Box 2724
 Austin, TX 78768-2724

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Mark you calendar!

Spring OWANA Meeting

Tuesday, March 5

7:00 pm

Mathews School Cafeteria
on West Lynn