



The Quarterly Newsletter of the Zilker Neighborhood Association

NEWS

February 2005

Austin, Texas

Planning for a Plan

by Dave Piper and Lorraine Atherton

The City of Austin has pushed to August the start of the Neighborhood Planning process for the Zilker, Barton Hills, South Lamar, and Galindo neighborhoods. The city's process seems to be changing constantly, and all the while, our neighborhoods are struggling to keep up with a barrage of rezoning and other land use issues. It seems that most of our communications with City Hall contain the sentence: "In the absence of a comprehensive neighborhood planning effort, we must oppose (fill in the blank)."

That's why it was so refreshing to hear about Karl Kehde at the Austin Neighborhoods Council last month. Kehde has recently completed 12 years of research into how neighborhood groups work with developers and city officials, and he has mapped out a cooperative process to determine the best land use for neighborhoods and communities. As he puts it: "The result of the research is that a neighborhood group can *lead* an effective project planning process with the developer and city officials even after there is substantial confrontation and plans have already been submitted/approved. No outside facilitator is used. The neighborhood group follows a straightforward, step-by-step team-building procedure specifically designed for neighborhood empowerment." (Visit landuse.org for more information.)

It's possible that the process he advocates could be incorporated into Austin's formal neighborhood planning process, but even if it is not, ZNA can employ the techniques on its own. The second half of ZNA's February 28 meeting has been reserved for Kehde's "Smarter Land Use" presentation. We hope it renews our enthusiasm for a better kind of neighborhood planning.

The ZNA Neighborhood Planning Committee has

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Next Quarterly ZNA Meeting Monday, February 28, 2005

6:30 P.M.

Zilker Elementary School
1900 Bluebonnet

*Homeowners, renters, and
business owners are welcome.*

Meet your neighbors.
Learn about issues affecting you and
the neighborhood you live in.

Agenda

6:30 P.M. Meet and Greet Social
Member sign-in

7:00 Call to order, announcements

7:15-7:45 Presentations
•Town Lake Trail Foundation
•ACC South Austin campus
•Barton Springs Lift Station update

7:45 Bylaws amendments
(members must sign in to vote)

8-9 P.M. Smarter Land Use
presentation by Karl Kehde

Continued from page 1

tabulated the results of the survey distributed in the October *Z-News*. Our thanks go out to the more than 80 people who responded.

Some of the results will undoubtedly help ZNA decide how to approach future zoning issues. For instance, more than 85% of respondents believe the percentage of residential uses compared with commercial uses should remain the same or be increased, but responses were more evenly divided about the mix of single-family and multi-family housing: 49% thought the mix should stay the same, 19% thought multifamily should increase, and 23% thought multifamily should be reduced. Less than 16% want more intense zoning to increase the neighborhood's density; a clear majority, 57%, prefer to "focus on better utilization of our current zoning capacity"; and 22% would like to limit density through down zoning. When asked how we would prefer to handle further density, the resounding response was 83% in favor of mixed-use zoning to add residential uses to existing commercial property. Half of respondents favored conversion of commercial zoning to residential as well.

It was no surprise that less than 4% favor widening South Lamar to seven lanes, and more than 71% want pedestrian and bicycle improvements on the Boulevard.

Perhaps the most useful part of the survey will be the many wide-ranging and thoughtful responses elicited by the

questions that asked for free-form comments. They cannot be summarized here, except to say that land use is not a simple either-or proposition in Zilker. We are working on finding an accessible place to post the complete survey results and other research gathered by the planning committee.

We hope that this year ZNA's planning committee will move beyond zoning and land use issues to study the question of affordability, particularly the role that non-profit organizations and government agencies might play in an affordable future for our neighborhood. A June 2001 report by the Austin Equity Commission entitled "Improving the Odds: Building a Comprehensive Opportunity Structure for Austin" seems a good place to begin. It is available on the City of Austin Web site: www.ci.austin.tx.us.

ZNA Officers for 2005

This year's ZNA executive committee (listed on the back page) is full of familiar names and faces, and ZNA's circle of friends keeps getting larger. Last October we managed to persuade some new folks to serve their time, er, serve their community as ZNA officers. Robin Sherwin,

Continued on next page

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Hill Abell, and Peggy Kelley are not new to the neighborhood, but this is their first year as elected officers. Next time you see them, thank them for helping out. Rachel Reitmeyer is new to Zilker, and she deserves a special welcome and thank-you for diving right into the association at her very first meeting.

Once again, we are without a chair for the Social Committee. Andrew Murphy has been filling that role by arranging our meetings at the school, but he can't continue to do *everything*. **Somebody, please, volunteer to head up the Social Committee.**

Here are ZNA's elected officers for 2005:

Lorraine Atherton, president, grew up in East Austin and has lived in Zilker since 1981. She works at home as a freelance copy editor, and she has been car-free for twelve years.

Robin Sherwin, vice president, moved to Austin in 1974. A Zilker resident since 1994, she's raised kids, vegetables, and hell in defense of clean air and water ever since.

Hill Abell, vice president, has lived in Zilker since 1981. With his wife, Laura (now a teacher at Parkside Commu-

nity School on Toomey Rd.), he has owned and operated Bicycle Sport Shop since 1985.

Rachel Reitmeyer, secretary, works in fundraising for St. Edward's University. She often takes Emmy the Wonder Weimaraner for walks all over the neighborhood or running at Town Lake. She and Andy are getting married March 12, 2005.

Andrew Murphy, treasurer, and his wife, Amy, moved to Kinney Avenue in 1994; a few months later, their daughter Josephine was born. On warm evenings you can find the family sitting on the front porch or taking a dip at Barton Springs.

Elizabeth Yevich, ANC delegate, has lived in Zilker since her move from Virginia in 2001. She got involved with ZNA to oppose the widening of South Lamar, which could remove the living room of her apartment.

Peggy Kelley, *Z-News* editor, teaches yoga, meditation and ayurveda at the Austin Yoga School in Lamar Plaza. With her partner, the artist R.J. Oehler, she maintains the Yoga School space for yoga, dance, aikido, contact improvisation, meditation, art exhibits and poetry readings.

KALEIDOPROPERTIES

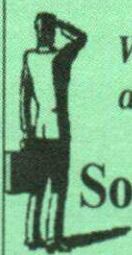


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Bylaws Amendments

by Lorraine Atherton

In October I submitted a collection of bylaws amendments to the membership to be voted on at our February meeting. These amendments have been gleaned from various attempts over the years to resolve inconsistencies that have hindered the routine functioning of the association. The bylaws and amendments are posted on the ZNA Web site, main.org/znaweb, under Site Map.

Robert's Rules of Order suggests that bylaws "include all the rules that are of such importance that they cannot be changed in any way without previous notice." Rules that should be subject to change by a simple majority vote at any regular meeting, however, should not be in the bylaws. Thus, this revision is proposed to our dues rules in

Article IV, section 2

Membership categories and dues for each category shall be determined by the executive committee. Changes in the basic annual dues shall be presented at the final quarterly meeting of the fiscal year for approval by a majority vote of the membership. The executive committee is empowered to waive or reduce dues for individual residents.

Our membership committees need to be able to set policies regarding member categories, pro-rating, and waiving of dues without amending the bylaws. This amendment gives the executive committee the flexibility to set those policies within the basic dues structure approved by the membership, but it prevents the executive committee from making a major change in dues in the middle of the year, without adequate notice to the membership. If this amendment is approved, section 3, on honorary memberships, can be deleted.

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Article V, section 3, Voting

The change from "at their initial meeting" to "upon receipt of dues" allows new members to join and become eligible to vote before they attend a meeting.

Article VI, section 2, Nominations

Since all ZNA committees must be appointed by the executive committee, the separate mention of a nominations committee here amounts to a tautology. Let's keep it simple and delete "or nominations committee."

The Nominations section requires that candidates be nominated at least a week *before* the fall meeting. The Elections section, however, still states that officers will be nominated *at* the fall meeting. This amendment removes the old reference to nominations in the elections section,

Article VI, section 3

Officers shall be elected for one-year terms by a simple

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majority vote of those members present and voting at the fall general meeting. If an office is contested, the election shall be by secret written ballot. Such ballots shall be cast and counted as the first order of business at the fall meeting. Officers-elect shall be installed at the end of the fall meeting.

Although ZNA has never had a contested election, our bylaws still require a secret written ballot for the election of officers. Usually, the membership waives the requirement at the beginning of the meeting and elects the entire slate by acclamation. To eliminate the waste of preparing unused ballots, the Elections amendment requires ballots for contested offices only.

This section also requires the immediate installation of newly elected officers. As *Roberts Rules* explains, that is the customary procedure for a brand-new organization. The new officers take over from the organizing committee as soon as they are elected. It is also customary, however, for the new organization to establish a more graceful transition for regular elections. ZNA never did that. This amendment corrects that problem by moving the installation of new officers to the end of the fall meeting.

Article VI, section 4, Duties of Officers

This section has been simplified to allow the officers to divide up tasks among themselves and to give the executive committee greater flexibility in recruiting the right volunteer for the right job.

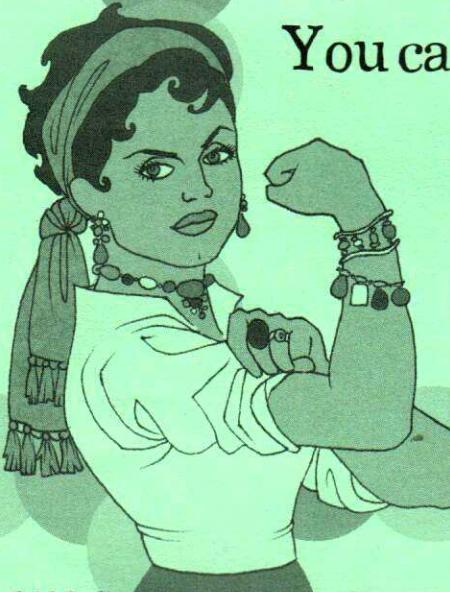
Article VII, section 3, Fiscal Year

Article XI, section 3 was our previous attempt to get ZNA activities on one annual schedule, with our big fall meeting marking the end of the ZNA year. A single statement that everything happens at the end of the fiscal year seemed an easy way to achieve that. Unfortunately, we ended up with the wrong date for the fiscal year. Our current date of October 1 means that memberships run from the fall meeting through the summer meeting and expire *before* the next fall meeting, instead of *after* the fall meeting. Likewise, the October 1 date means that new officers are elected at the beginning of the fiscal year instead of the end, and their term is out of sync with the ZNA meeting schedule and calendar year. The simplest way to correct these inconsistencies is to move the beginning of our fiscal year to November 1, immediately after the October meeting. If this change to Article VII is approved, we can delete section 3 of Article XI. If this change is not approved, we will need to decide on some other way to resolve the numerous conflicts between "fall meeting" and "end of fiscal year" within the bylaws.

Article VIII, section 2, Executive Committee

The lengthy clause about nonvoting ex officio members is unnecessary. If it is removed, the executive committee will still be able to cooperate with other neighborhood groups to fulfill the objectives of the association. If it remains, it could be interpreted to restrict the number and type of groups that can be invited to work with ZNA on, for instance, neighborhood planning.

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A Message from the Town Lake Trail Foundation

In 1985, Austin had roughly 6,000 acres of parkland and 240 employees dedicated to operations and maintenance. Today, Austin has 16,000 acres of parkland and just 100 hard-working O&M employees. As a result of declining city tax revenues and higher debt, along with dramatic increases in pedestrian and bike traffic, the Town Lake Trail greenbelt is showing signs of decay. Yet, of the \$100 million raised in the 1998 bond election, not one cent was dedicated to improvements along the trail.

Runners and friends of the trail formed the Town Lake Trail Foundation in 2003 as a 501c(3) nonprofit corporation. Our vision is to ensure that Town Lake Trail remains the most beautiful, natural, fitness-friendly hike and bike trail in an urban area in the United States. We raised almost \$300,000 in 2004 and are introducing a number of projects, including a new restroom, *Healthy Trees for the Trail*, restoration and widening of Lou Neff Point, new trailhead maps, mile markers and directional signs, and the Lady Bird Johnson Adopt-a-Garden program. And we're just getting started.

For more information, visit www.townlaketrail.org, or attend the ZNA meeting on February 28. You can contact the foundation at P.O. Box 5195, Austin, TX 78763.

Mary Lee Foundation Lays the Cornerstone for Affordable Housing

by Lorraine Atherton

On November 19, 2004, the Mary Lee Community celebrated the opening of its new Cornerstone apartments at 1322 Lamar Square Drive. Through the construction of 8 new units and the rehabilitation of 22 existing units, the Cornerstone provides a total of 30 rental units for low-income families with special needs.

The Mary Lee Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded in 1963, provides affordable housing and supportive services to low-income families with special needs due to developmental disabilities, mental illness, and brain injuries.

Anyone who remembers the condition of the Lamar Square apartment blocks from the early nineties will be astounded by the transformation taking place there. The Cornerstone is just the first phase in the Mary Lee Community's long-range plan to rehabilitate Lamar Square with a variety of affordable housing options. The ZNA congratulates all the Mary Lee folks on the successful completion of this milestone project, and we thank them for making it possible for 30 new families to call Zilker home.

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Police Partners

The Southwest Area Command for the Austin Police Dept. has a new commander, Joy Mooney, replacing Duane McNeill. You may know Duane from the Commander's Forum meetings that ZNA has been touting for some time now. (Call Bobby Rigney at 471-3758 to learn about the next forum.)

The area commander oversees our local district representatives. Zilker's DR is Officer Dawn Leonard, at 974-4405. In an emergency always call 911, but if you would like police help or information, call Dawn. She is also very good about responding to questions that neighbors post on the Zilker Yahoo group, and you can usually find her at ZNA's quarterly meetings. Commander McNeill described the DR's role: They "assist in solving neighborhood problems. They attend community meetings to educate residents on crime prevention, help form neighborhood watch programs, address signs of urban decay like abandoned vehicles and graffiti, work closely with the school district.... They depend on information from the people who live and work in our part of Austin."

Officer Leonard has been a big help in the Zilker neighborhood over the last year. ZNA appreciates her efforts. We also thank Commander McNeill for his work in South Austin over the years, and we welcome Commander Mooney to the neighborhood.

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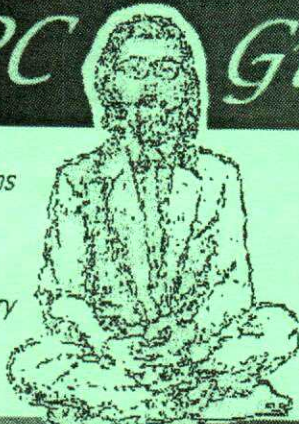
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The Density Debate:

Density and Affordability

by Lorraine Atherton and Jeff Jack

Some affordable housing advocates would say that the high cost of housing in Austin is clear evidence that we need to put more housing on the market, and we agree that the market is part of the solution. They go on to argue, however, that to address the affordable housing crisis we must replace our older neighborhoods with new types of housing at much higher densities. So just how many more housing units must be built in our neighborhoods to make the market price fall to an affordable level, based on supply and demand? Let's look at what's happened right here in the Zilker neighborhood.

Over the last 25 years, almost every vacant lot has been filled with new houses or duplexes, and practically every block has some older homes that have been added on to,

with garages or carports converted to garage apartments or granny flats. New apartment and condo projects have been built too, such as the projects on Kinney Avenue and in Lost Canyon. Between the 1990 Census and the 2000 Census, our number of housing units increased by about 5%. Has the cost of housing in our neighborhood gone down with this increased supply and increased density? The answer, as we all know, is No. In fact, although we still have vacancies, the cost of housing has gone up significantly over the last decade. The new units on Kinney, for example, are no where near what most of us would consider affordable. So what is going on?

Supply and Demand

When trying to match supply with demand for housing, timing is critical. If a large number of people move here when housing is not readily available, they will bid up the price (inflating property tax assessments at the same time—but the dysfunctional tax system in Texas is a topic for another day). The Community Action Network's 1999 report "Through the Roof" notes, "The increased demand

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on existing housing and slow addition of new stock drove up housing prices. Between 1990 and 1998, average single-family home prices rose from \$87,600 to \$149,669, a 71-percent increase." The cost of housing has continued to rise since then.

Using the 2000 Census and the City of Austin's 2004 statistics, we can estimate that Austin in 2004 had, for a population of 692,000, about 277,000 housing units, averaging 2.5 persons per household. If that is where we are today, what will we need in the future for supply to meet demand? Our regional planning agencies commonly project a population increase of about half a million in Austin over the next 20 to 40 years. Just to keep up, we will need to add about 200,000 housing units, an increase of 72%.

Costs and the Market

For our article on density and sprawl (*Z-News*, Oct. 2004), we calculated that if all of Zilker's current residential capacity is fully utilized and mixed use is added to our commercial zoning, Zilker could accommodate a population increase of 145%, a good deal more than our fair share to meet regional projections. The trick, of course, is finding a way to make that housing affordable. The last forty years have shown that market-driven housing construction will not make Austin more affordable, if growth continues as projected.

That is because of four major factors that influence the cost of housing:

- 1) the cost of land,
- 2) the cost of construction,
- 3) the cost of financing, and
- 4) the profit expectation or return on investment.

When considering the cost of new housing, it's clear that for any real affordability to be realized, land prices must be low, and that usually means acquiring larger tracts for development. In our older residential areas, large undeveloped parcels are all but nonexistent. The market value of small single-family tracts in our neighborhoods is already inflated, which effectively eliminates any opportunity to acquire land there at a reasonable price. Keep in mind, the basic cost of a small lot in Zilker starts at \$100,000. Before any other factor is considered, the exceptionally high cost of land drives up the cost of housing in Austin.

Without large reasonably priced parcels, a housing project cannot achieve the economies of scale that larger projects rely on for both soft and hard costs. The costs per unit for design, permitting, and construction all go up when housing is developed lot by lot. Add to that the extra costs of building in an urban environment (extending utilities, repairing streets, etc.). The third factor, financing expenses

(including interest rates, closing costs, and processing fees), also goes up as the cost of development increases. In most cases, all expenses are higher per unit for individual small projects than for larger developments.

Finally, when developers analyze a project's financial potential, estimating its return on investment and risk, they will look to market demand to set the upper limit for pricing. In Austin's current market, demand for housing in close-in urban neighborhoods is high across all income levels, but it is the higher income levels that are perceived to be offering a higher return. That is the market that is driving the creation of new housing, and that is what is increasing housing costs in Zilker.

Profit vs. Non-profit

In the end, the premise that increasing the housing supply in any amount will lower the price of housing is false, as long as demand outpaces supply. Since Austin has become a destination city, prospects for reducing demand are slim. On the other side of the equation, we cannot expect lenders to finance an oversupply to drive down prices deliberately and reduce the potential return on investment. The market will most likely continue to cater to newcomers with higher incomes. That will leave the construction of affordable housing almost entirely to nonprofit or government subsidy programs.

This is not peculiar to Austin. In every major city in North America, Japan, and Western Europe, as density has increased, so has the overall cost of living—in particular the cost of housing with regard to income levels. In most of our highly urbanized areas, increased density has not spurred the market to build more affordable housing. Whether it is rent control in New York City or government-assisted housing in Houston, maintaining an adequate supply of affordable housing has required the community's intervention in the market, through nonprofit or government agencies. With that in mind, we hope that this year ZNA will take a realistic look at the Zilker community's role in neighborhood affordability.

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Our Woman at Wheatsville

One of ZNA's former officers, Jane Kurzawa Cravey, was elected to the Wheatsville Food Co-op Board of Directors this winter.

When the Fiesta supermarket closed in Lamar Plaza two years ago, one of the most interesting prospects for a neighborhood grocery store to replace it was Wheatsville, which was considering the feasibility of opening a South Austin store.

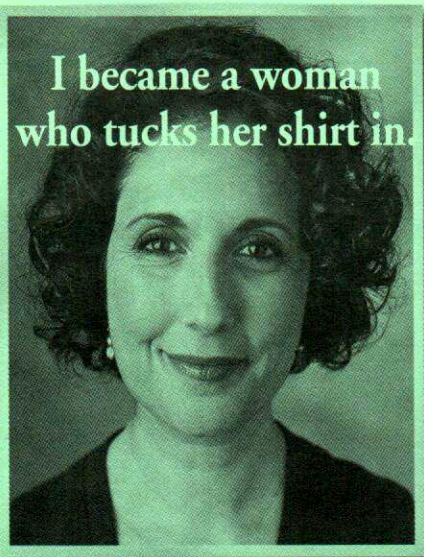
Wheatsville has since decided to hold off opening a second store for now, and will concentrate on renovations to its current location at 3101 Guadalupe. However, Jane is eager to build support for Wheatsville in South Austin: an option for the long-term is to open a second location. For more information, or if you want to help with the renovation project, please call Jane at 447-8014 or email her at jkcravey@earthlink.net.

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ZNA Web site Seeking Creative Minds

Richard Gravois, ZNA web master for the past 3 years, is interested in finding other techies out there who might be interested in working on the ZNA Web site. The current site may be seen at www.main.org/znaweb. As most of us know by now, Web sites can be great tools for disseminating information. They can also be great opportunities for people with good design and computer skills to shine. Please contact Richard if you are interested at 441-3430.

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Zilker Neighbors Have the Spirit!

by Barbara Cossie

Thanks to everyone who supported ZNA's 2004 Holiday Family Program by dropping off gifts or giving money. Because of you, six families from Zilker Elementary School had a happier holiday. Each family received toys for the kids, clothes, needed household items, food, gift cards, and some cash. They were all very grateful for the spirit of giving shown by their Zilker neighbors.

Last year's donors were: Toni Altieri, Tom Amiss, Lorraine Atherton and Mike Meier, Linda Boxberger and Awad Abdelgadir, Elaine Brawn, Deborah Bice-Broussard and Allen Broussard, Jan Castleberry, Bruce and Barbara Christman, Nan Clayton, Patricia Cramer, Robin and Jane Cravey, Curtis and Sharon Deike, Janet Dunkelberg and David LaPier, Shudde Fath, Richard and Paulette Gravois, Jeff Jack, Mark Kamburis of Flipnotics, Peggy Kelley, Fontaine Maverick, Eleanor McKinney, Kelly Moscowwitz and Matt Rourke, Andrew and Josephine Murphy, Sue Nagle, Amelie Parks, Dave Piper, Don and Kim Pryor, Iris Ramos, the Reeds (Robert, Mary, and Hannah), Rachel Reitmeyer, Peach and Cynthia Reynolds, Bobby Rigney,

Tony Sirgo, Sarah Shaw, the Sides (Steve, Mary Ann, and Grant), Maggie and Zoe Trungale, David Ward, and Elizabeth Yevich.

Thanks to Vicki Samuelson, Zilker School counselor, for finding the families; Kaye Trybus made phone calls and kept the lists of donors; Lorraine Atherton and Mike Meier used their gift-wrapping skills (and it is a skill!) to wrap the many items of various shapes and sizes; Lorraine and Mike and Mary Ann and Grant Sides helped deliver the gifts to the families. (Mary Ann's bilingual skill came in handy with our Spanish-speaking families!) Thank you each and every one for your gifts, love, support, energy, and time to make the Zilker Holiday Family Program the success it is.

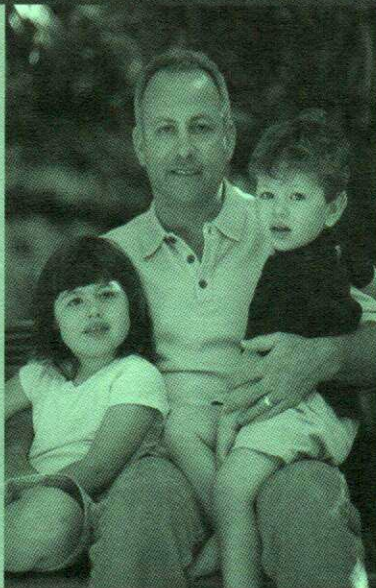
When we started this project six years ago, the ZNA executive committee sponsored only one family. It was at our December executive meeting that Jeff Jack suggested that the executive committee sponsor a family from Zilker School. Since that time, as the years have increased, so has the number of families. Last year (our sixth), ZNA was able to sponsor six families. In 2005, can we go for seven? If I know ZNA, I think we can!

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8th

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NEWS

Newsletter of the Zilker Neighborhood Association

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P.O. Box 33546, Austin, TX 78764-0546

Editor:

Peggy Kelley, 440-1269

Ad Sales:

Fontaine Maverick, 443-3290

Distribution:

Andrew Murphy, 442-9380

Web Site:

Richard Gravois, 441-3430

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About the Zilker Neighborhood Association

ZNA holds general meetings the 4th Monday of February, April, July, and October. The Executive Committee meets at 7 pm the first Monday of each month, usually at Artz Rib House.

Our purpose: To improve the quality of life in the neighborhood in matters of land use, environmental protection, public services, consumer protection, preservation of the historic and unique character of the community; to provide support in other matters of neighborhood concern and to promote and participate in the civic life of the city.

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