

# Z NEWS

Newsletter of the  
Zilker Neighborhood  
Association

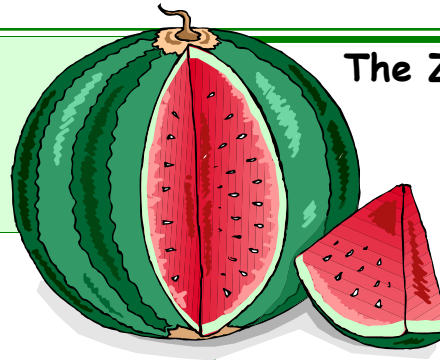
JULY 2014

Austin, Texas  
Established 1981

## Umlauf Home and Studio to Join Sculpture Garden

by Lisa Jones, Development Manager,  
Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum

FINAL APPROVAL is pending for additional City of Austin funding to stabilize the Umlauf home and studio at 506 Barton Boulevard. Our City partnership is coordinated through the Parks and Recreation Department. Meanwhile, work on uniting the Garden and Museum grounds at 605 Robert E. Lee with the property has begun. Our friends and visitors express overwhelming interest in visiting the property “up the hill,” and—while an opening date is still in the future—we’re moving toward the united 7.9 acres Charles and Angeline Umlauf *(Continued on page 2)*



## The Zilker Neighborhood Association

invites you to the

## WATERMELON SOCIAL

July 28,

Monday, 7-8:30 PM

behind Zilker Elementary School

1900 block of Ann Arbor



Meet your neighbors, eat watermelon,  
and celebrate Zilker



This year, City of Austin environmental staff  
will be distributing info on  
“Keeping water on the land” (See page 6)



Newcomers, homeowners, renters,  
business neighbors

❖ ❖ **All Welcome** ❖ ❖

## What Zilker Voters Need to Know About Property Tax Reform

by Lorraine Atherton, ZNews Editor

AS THE CAMPAIGN fund-raising season revved up in May, so did the season for property tax protests, focused on steep rises in residential appraisals. In a June 2 press release, Bruce Elfant, the Travis County tax assessor-collector, noted that residential property owners were right to demand a fair tax appraisal process. By the middle of June, however, efforts to persuade the Travis County Commissioners and the Austin City Council to challenge the appraisal district's lop-sided valuations had failed, at least for this year.

Attention has since shifted to the city's lack of a homestead exemption.

Noting that a recent increase in the over-65 exemption, from \$51,000 to \$70,000, is estimated to cost the city's general fund \$3 million in 2015, a City Council resolution proposed by Council Member Kathie Tovo directed the City Manager to analyze the effect of a homestead exemption on the city budget.

Of the range of ways to reduce *(Continued on page 3)*

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envisioned when they deeded their home, his studio, and 168 works of art to the people of Austin.

On site, serious ground-work in the Garden and on the Umlauf property continues through the summer, with plans for more work this fall. Certified landscaper Jerry Levenson and friends are generously donating time to oversee volunteers in a property cleanup. The project includes weed and undergrowth removal, tree trimming, and general landscape management. This huge project is expected to take eight months to complete.

Umlauf is also getting some four-footed help from the goats of Vagabond Land Management. Austin Parks Foundation has been sponsoring a goat-grazing pilot project for weed eradication in the garden. Goats have a particular fondness for poison ivy, cats-claw, and other invasive species, and their light-footed approach makes them perfect for getting at those hard-to-reach places without the use of chemicals or herbicides.

To help keep its spaces beautiful between professional gardening work, the Museum relies



*Two volunteers learn how to wash, wax, and care for sculptures with curator Katie Edwards, at a Bronze Conservation workshop in the Umlauf Sculpture Garden.*

on the help of our dedicated volunteers. Groups of any size can spend 3-5 morning hours sweeping, gardening, and cleaning up the grounds. This month we're recruiting volunteers for July 28, 8:30-11 AM. To learn more about our "Garden Clean Up" opportunities, please contact Sara Beck, Volunteer Coordinator, at [sara.beck@umlauftsculpture.org](mailto:sara.beck@umlauftsculpture.org) or 512-445-5582.

At our summer Bronze Conservation workshop on June 21, 25 enthusiastic volunteers ages 5 to 65 (including your neighbor and Umlauf board member Charlotte Boyle) learned how to wash, wax, and care for our sculptures with Umlauf curator, Katie Edwards. Umlauf's mission to make our sculpture accessible to everyone encourages touching, which makes regular preservation work essential. The next workshop is planned for November 21; anyone interested in participating should

contact our Director of Programs, Diane Sikes, at [diane.sikes@umlauftsculpture.org](mailto:diane.sikes@umlauftsculpture.org) or 512-445-5582 x101.

We've enjoyed hosting the monthly ZNA executive meetings, and hope you'll consider joining us as members of Umlauf. We'll see you soon in the Garden!

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(Continued from page 1) the property tax burden on homeowners, a city homestead exemption is probably the least effective. Only one-fifth of our total property tax goes to the city. For example, the maximum exemption of 20% on my house value translates into a \$400 reduction in my city tax. But the valuation on my house has been rising 10% a year. Even with the maximum exemption, my property tax overall would still increase \$600, and the City Council would likely make up the difference in city revenue by manipulating the tax rate and cutting valuable city services. Proposals to phase in an exemption at, say, 5% a year would provide no tax relief to those who need it most. A city homestead exemption would not be useful unless the factors that are inflating residential property valuations and pushing more of the tax burden onto homeowners are brought under control.

According to Elfant, the state's failure to require disclosure of sales prices "makes the process of determining fair market value far more expensive and problematic than it should be. . . The Texas Legislature should make all sales available to appraisal districts and require appraisal protests to be based on true market value. They should also review the many pages of exemptions in the Property Tax Code that have been carved out for all manner of special interests."

Elfant goes on to point out that the larger issue is that in Texas, local governments must rely on property tax revenues to fund schools, roads, emergency services, courts, parks, libraries, etc. "Even if the legislature addresses the fairness issues (and they should), the property tax burden will still be too high especially for many property owners with (Continued on page 5)

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## On the Move in Zilker

by Eileen Nehme, for Wabucy Zilker

### Cycle track modifications at Ashby

In response to neighborhood concerns, the City of Austin Bicycle Program has redesigned the section of the Bluebonnet cycle track at Ashby to narrow the crossing and increase visibility for those exiting the track at this intersection. Although the requested speed humps on Melridge were cut from the project, feedback from young users and their parents suggests the improvements increase safety. If you have an opinion on these changes, you can post them to the Wabucy Zilker Facebook page.

### Treadwell sidewalk project moving forward

Wabucy's Neighborhood Partnering Program application for a sidewalk along Treadwell to fill the gap from Kinney to the new Lamar Union development has received a favorable response from the City of Austin Department of Public Works. The neighborhood's required \$14,000 match will be met through an \$8,000 donation from Greystar (developer of Lamar Union) and a pledge of volunteer hours toward maintaining and beautifying the alley between



*Nora and Iris test the improved visibility of the realigned bike and pedestrian crossing at Bluebonnet and Ashby*

*Photo by Rene Renteria*

Treadwell and Dexter, which will become more accessible with the new sidewalk in place. If the project is approved, we should see implementation in early 2015. Thanks to ZNA for its longtime advocacy on this sidewalk gap, and neighbor Suvi Aika for restarting the effort. Look for opportunities to contribute to the volunteer match hours in the coming year!

**WaBuCy Zilker (Walk, Bus, Cycle) = neighbors working to increase walking, bus riding, and cycling for transportation and to advocate for related infrastructure improvements in the Zilker neighborhood.**

To keep informed on issues of walking, bus riding, and cycling in the Zilker area, find WaBuCy on Facebook, or e-mail [wabucy@gmail.com](mailto:wabucy@gmail.com)

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(Continued from page 3) modest incomes."

The problem is acute in Austin. More than half of our property tax goes to the school district. Because the Texas Legislature has shirked its responsibility to fund public schools, most of the school taxes raised in Austin are not spent on Austin schools. Through the Robin Hood system, they are sent to the state to fund poor districts. In the next session of the Legislature, Texans must demand school funding reform requiring the state and Texas businesses to pay their fair share of school funding across the state.

### Neighbors Organize Now for Fair Taxes

AUSTINITES FOR FAIR TAXES is a grassroots group of residents from neighborhoods throughout Austin that is pushing for reforms to make the property tax system fairer for all taxpayers. The group has heard from many residents that unaffordable property taxes are forcing long-time residents to leave their neighborhoods. The group is particularly concerned that inequities in the property tax appraisal system have transferred the property tax burden to low- and middle-income residential property owners and renters.

Residents of the neighborhood are welcome to attend the next meeting of Austinites for Fair Taxes at 6:30 PM on July 21, 2014, at the Faith United Methodist Church located at 2701 South Lamar Boulevard (next to Matt's El Rancho). If you would like to join the group, please send an email to: [austinfairtax-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:austinfairtax-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

*David King, ZNA VP*



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## The Problem with Impervious Cover, and What You Can Do About It

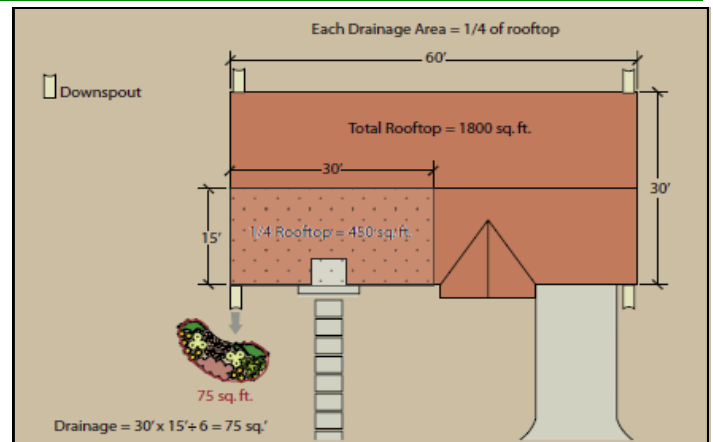
AS OUR NEIGHBORHOOD'S characteristic smaller houses are expanded or replaced, the yards and landscapes surrounding these houses are shrinking, and places where water can soak into the ground are disappearing. The effect on water quality is described in a series of publications available from the City of Austin's Grow Green program ([growgreen.org](http://growgreen.org)). One, the Earth-wise Guide to Landscape Design, puts it this way:

*With increased population growth and smaller lots, much of our land is being covered with roadways, rooftops, parking lots and sidewalks that do not let water soak into the soil. This decreases baseflow (the constant flow in a creek) while increasing the chances of flooding and streambank erosion. The result is that many creeks have excessive flow during heavy rains and dry up shortly afterwards. You can help both our waterways and your drainage problems by incorporating some "greenscape" techniques into your landscape plans.*

The Earth-wise Guide goes on to identify several techniques that we can apply in our own yards:

*Keep dirt and mulch out of the storm drain!*

*Soil is one of our most common pollutants. Bare dirt can erode during rainfall and travel to our creeks, clogging waterways, damaging fish gills and carrying chemicals with it. Solutions:*



From Step 3, Calculate the size and shape of your garden, in the Earth-wise Guide to Rain Gardens

- Plant or mulch any bare soil
- Stabilize eroded areas as needed
- Install erosion controls if you are doing construction or landscaping projects

One relatively new technique, rain gardens, is especially well-suited to the drainage problems that individual Zilker homeowners deal with in their own yards. A rain garden is a shallow depression planted with attractive vegetation, designed to absorb and filter runoff from hard (impervious) surfaces like roofs, sidewalks, and driveways. Properly designed, it will catch and store rainfall for short periods of time and then dry out, helping to conserve water in the landscape and to solve drainage issues in the yard. According to the Earth-wise Guide to Rain Gardens,

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“The goal of a rain garden is to keep water on the land. Rain gardens, with their shallow depressions, capture stormwater and provide for natural infiltration into the soil. This provides water for the plants and helps maintain a constant flow of water in our streams through groundwater. They also help filter out pollutants including fertilizers, pesticides, oil, heavy metals and other chemicals that would otherwise reach our creeks through storm drains or drainage ditches. By reducing the quantity of water that runs off your property, rain gardens help lower the risk of flooding and erosion.”

The guide illustrates six do-it-yourself steps to create a rain garden in situations just like those commonly found around Zilker homes.

That's why ZNA has invited City of Austin staff to the Watermelon Social on Monday, July 28, to distribute Grow Green literature and chat with neighbors about ways to keep water on the land. Check out [growgreen.org](http://growgreen.org) and come on down to Little Zilker Park, behind Zilker Elementary School, to learn more about outdoor water conservation.

*Lorraine Atherton*

**Volunteer at Little Zilker Park**

City staff are also advising the Friends of Little Zilker Neighborhood Park on how small-scale berm and swale techniques might be used to prevent erosion of the trail in the park. Contact FLZP at [littlezilker@gmail.com](mailto:littlezilker@gmail.com) to find out how to participate in future volunteer projects. Subscribe to the FLZP Yahoo group to keep up with planning, meetings, and events.

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## All About the Zilker Neighborhood Association

THE ZILKER NEIGHBORHOOD Association (ZNA) was established 30 years ago with the mission of protecting the character of the neighborhood surrounding Zilker Elementary School and enhancing the quality of life for all our residents. ZNA is a volunteer organization that works to ensure appropriate code enforcement, resolve traffic safety issues, maintain historic and cultural resources, protect the environment, and ensure that our neighborhood's interests are heard at City Hall. ZNA is registered with the Secretary of State as a Texas Uniform Unincorporated Nonprofit Association.

- ZNA's objectives, under our bylaws, are to:
- Represent and advance the interests of residents in the neighborhood.
- Keep all residents informed of issues vital to the neighborhood by appropriate communications and meetings.
- Establish standing and ad hoc committees to investigate and make recommendations to the association on all matters of neighborhood concern.
- Seek the improvement of single and multiple dwellings by residents and absentee owners.
- Establish mutual protection and safety.
- Improve safety of the streets through better traffic control.
- Provide a greater emphasis on inclusion of apartment dwellers as integral members of the community.

- Facilitate the education of residents regarding available options relating to home ownership, zoning, rights, etc.
- Work toward development and preservation of natural green spaces, parks, trees, landscaping, and general land-use management.
- Develop, adopt, and monitor a neighborhood plan, including an inventory of land uses and facilities.

ZNA has a proud history of strong advocacy for our neighborhood. We encourage you to join today and help keep Zilker a great place to live.

**Why?** To be effective in our mission, ZNA needs your participation. Membership dues support our meeting expenses, the neighborhood newsletter, and the Web site, as well as activities such as the July Watermelon Social. Contributions above the annual dues are welcomed and support neighborhood, school, and parks projects. Membership also affords you the opportunity to vote on important issues addressed at our quarterly meetings.

**Who?** Membership is open to all Zilker residents, both homeowners and renters, who are at least 18 years old. Nonresident property owners are not eligible for membership.

**How?** Annual dues are \$7 per person. Fill out the membership form below and mail it with your payment to the address provided, or join in person at the next quarterly meeting. All memberships run from November 1 to October 31.

### BECOME A ZNA MEMBER TODAY

Membership is open to Zilker residents (renters or homeowners) 18 years old or older.

Nonresident property owners are not eligible for membership.

Members may vote on issues addressed at ZNA quarterly meetings. Voting privileges are activated 30 days after membership dues are received. However, if you were a paid member last year, you can renew your membership anytime this year (including the general meeting dates) and retain voting privileges.

**Annual dues are \$7 per person. Please list each member name and e-mail address below.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues amount: \_\_\_\_\_ Additional contribution: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to Zilker Neighborhood Association and mail with this form to:

ZNA Memberships, 2009 Arpdale St, Austin, TX 78704  
or bring this form with you to the next ZNA meeting

For ZNA bylaws and other info, visit [zilkerneighborhood.org](http://zilkerneighborhood.org).



**ZNA Voting Privileges**

To be eligible to vote at ZNA meetings, you must be a member for at least 30 days before the date of the vote. If you were a ZNA member in 2013, you may renew anytime before the October 2014 meeting and immediately be eligible to vote.

**Volunteer for the Neighborhood**

Every sidewalk gap filled or park improvement completed in Zilker today began years ago when concerned neighbors got together to try and make things better. ZNA is looking for ways to bring neighbors together and get the most out of our volunteer efforts. Please think about what you would like to do to make Zilker better, and e-mail ZilkerNA@

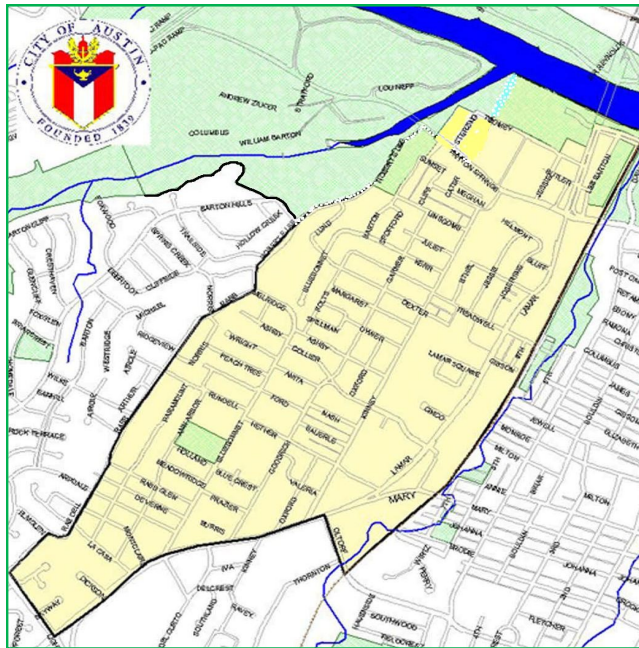
austin.rr.com, or come to the **Watermelon Social on July 28**, to volunteer. Nominations for next year's officers are open till October 13.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

*How often does ZNA meet?* Quarterly, on the last Monday in February, July, and October and the third Monday in May, at Zilker Elementary School, 1900 Bluebonnet Lane. The Executive Committee meets the first Monday of each month, at 7 PM at the Umlauf Sculpture Garden and Museum (until further notice).

*Is Zilker@yahoogroups.com ZNA's official list serve?* No. It is owned by Richard Gravois, one of the founders of ZNA. All residents are welcome to join, whether they are ZNA members or not.

*I want to build something that does not comply with city code. Will ZNA support my request for a variance?* ZNA encourages all neighbors to comply with city ordinances. ZNA has a longstanding policy of not supporting variance requests if the property does not have a unique physical feature that qualifies as a hardship under city code. Personal or financial circumstances do not qualify.



ZNA boundaries include Zilker Park and Rabb Road on the west and extend to the railroad on the east, Barton Skyway on the south, and Lady Bird Lake on the north. Residents on both sides of boundary streets are eligible for membership.

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## McMansion Buyers Beware: What You See Is What You Will Have to Live With

IF YOU KNOW any families planning on buying a large house in the neighborhood, please alert them to these "Buyer Beware" tips.

Under Austin's city code, houses are limited to a floor-to-area ratio (FAR) of 40% and impervious cover of 45%. (See page 6 for more information on the importance of impervious cover.) If you are considering buying a house that you would like to add on to or change, you need to be sure that the house is not already built out to those limits.

Developers have been taking advantage of loopholes in the city's McMansion ordinance to build residences that would otherwise exceed the maximum square footage and impervious cover allowed under city code. When these maxed-out houses are sold, the buyers expect to be able to add a garage or pavement similar to features common to smaller houses in the neighborhood. When they try to do so, they find that city inspectors will not allow it.

Some homeowners have sought exemptions or variances through the city's Residential Design and Compatibility Commission (RDCC) or the Board of Adjustment. So far, none has been successful. The message seems to be: If the owner was somehow misled by the developer into believing a garage could be added, then the owner's redress is with the builder, not the city. In other words, buyer beware.

The most common sign of trouble ahead is

a garage that looks unfinished, as though the builder left off the garage door and windows so that the new owners could choose the door style for themselves. This often means that the developer chose to have the parking structure permitted as a carport so that its square footage would not count toward the FAR for the whole house. This is called a carport exemption. Builders are using the carport exemption to build as large a house as possible under the McMansion ordinance. The homeowner needs to understand that such a carport cannot be enclosed in the future, and that includes installing a garage door.

On July 2, the ZNA zoning committee asked the RDCC, which oversees the McMansion ordinance, to consider revising the ordinance to remove the distinction between carports and garages with regard to FAR. For the last year, ZNA has had to deal with a series of attempts to circumvent the ordinance. The first case was at 2005 Bluebonnet; the Board of Adjustment denied the variance requested there in May 2013. But the cases seem to be multiplying, and they are wasting the time of development review staff, code compliance inspectors, our zoning committee volunteers, the nearby neighbors, and especially the time and money of the new homeowners. The RDCC agreed that the definition of carport is a problem, and it has added the carport exemption to its list of abuses of the McMansion ordinance.

Another common issue that new homeowners need to be aware of is impervious cover. Builders are building right up to the impervious cover limit and not putting walkways up to the front, side, or back porches. The actual unused amount of impervious cover remaining is critical. Homeowners should determine whether there is enough unpaved area to allow the addition of walkways, patios, swimming pools (the concrete around a swimming pool above the water is impervious cover), and decks in the future.

If the builder used any of the other exemptions in calculating McMansion FAR, the homeowner needs to understand exactly what that exemption requires.

While researching these doorless garage cases, the ZNA zoning committee has uncovered another disturbing trend. The builders of almost all of these new houses are being allowed to pay a fee-in-lieu instead of building the required sidewalks. With the number of remodels and new construction in Zilker, we would have sidewalks all through the neighborhood in a few years if the required sidewalks were

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actually built. So far, we have been unable to ascertain what the city is doing with the sidewalk fees that have been collected.

*Lorraine Atherton, Dave Piper, and Bruce Wiland contributed to this report*

**Austin City Limits Music Festival 2014 Schedule**

THE AUSTIN CITY LIMITS Music Festival will be the first two weekends in October. The schedule for road and park closures should be:

Installation (called "load in") starts September 30

The first weekend of concerts is October 3-5 (11 AM-10 PM daily)

Roads and most of the park should be open between weekends

Second weekend of concerts is October 10-12 (11 AM-10 PM daily)

Load out ends Friday, October 17

There should be a period of park maintenance October 20-24

Check "Neighborhood FAQs" on the event Web site, ACLfestival.com, for updates in September.

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# **Z** Newsletter of the Zilker Neighborhood **NEWS** Association

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## **2014 Executive Committee of ZNA**

*The Executive Committee may be contacted by e-mail through [www.zilkerneighborhood.org](http://www.zilkerneighborhood.org)*

### **Elected Officers:**

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*2nd VP:* David King  
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*Social Chair:* Mary Sledd  
*ANC Delegate:* Elizabeth Yevich  
*ZNews Editor:* Lorraine Atherton, 447-7681

### **About the Zilker Neighborhood Association**

ZNA holds quarterly meetings, usually the last Monday of February, May, July, and October, at Zilker Elementary School, 1900 Bluebonnet Lane. The Executive Committee meets at 7 PM the first Monday of each month. Watch the Web site for updates.

**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.

### **Committee Chairs:**

*Holiday Families Program:* Barbara Cossie, 447-4437  
*Membership:* Tony Giustino  
*Parks and Environment:* Gardner Sumner, 468-6200  
*Sound:* Bill Neale, bneale15@yahoo.com  
*Voter Outreach:* Elizabeth Yevich  
*Web site and ZNews Advertising:* Dave Piper, 916-9636  
*Zoning:* David King, 415-6016, and Bill Neale

### **New Neighbor? New Voter?**

**Last day to register to vote in November is Monday, October 6.**

If you are new to the neighborhood, don't put off changing your address for your voter registration.

Be sure that your vote counts in the election for our new District 5 City Council member.

In the spring primaries, only 22% of the 2812 voters registered in Zilker Precinct 332 voted.

In Precinct 340, only 12% of the 1988 registered voters showed up.

Go to [traviscountytax.org](http://traviscountytax.org) to find out how to update your voter registration.

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