Austin purchases 611 acres in aquifer recharge zone for $11.8 million

Purchase connects 30-mile trail corridor, prevents building more than 500 homes covering 58 acres

By Kate Hull

On Aug. 31, the City of Austin finalized the purchase of 611 acres in Spillar Ranch, the southern portion of subdivision Avaña-Esquel, in Southwest Austin and northern Hays County.

The city plans to prevent the development of more than 500 homes in the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone and connect the land to the Violet Crown Trail, a 30-mile regional trail system. Avaña-Esquel is a new development that started construction in November 2010.

“Austin is a city that understands the link between protecting our natural resources today to ensure our health and economic success in the future,” Mayor Lee Leffingwell said in an August statement. “We envisioned a dream more than a decade ago to balance development in the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer recharge zone with land conservation. [This purchase] proves that we have made great progress toward the protection of critical open space.”

The City of Austin and the Nature Conservancy of Texas collaborated to buy the land from Dallas-based 668 Avaña Land Holdings for $11.8 million. 668 Avaña Land Holdings did

Austin Energy’s proposed rate increase garners speculation

13 percent rate hike stirs mixed feelings among users

By Bobby Longoria

Seventeen years without increasing its base rate has left Austin Energy with a $131 million shortfall, prompting a 13 percent systemwide rate increase that the utility says is necessary to make ends meet. Opponents, however, believe the increase burdens residential customers in favor of industrial and commercial users.

As fuel costs have risen over the years, customer bills have been ridded with increasing power supply charges used to meet the utility’s growth, said Larry Weis, general manager of Austin Energy. The rate redesign will bring power supply charges to zero and embed the cost within the new rates.

Although a rate redesign was brought up nearly a decade ago, and while the utility has been operating at a loss for years, it was not until AE presented its Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan last year that the utility felt it necessary to increase rates in order to meet the city’s growth and need, Weis said.

“We want each customer [segment] to stand on its own and pay its cost of service to try to impede any complaints that these rates aren’t fair,” he said.

If the public discussion and Austin City Council approve the rate design, it will bring power supply charges to zero and embed the cost within the new rates.

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General Manager’s Note

Who’s looking out for your interests and those of your neighborhood? Austin is full of groups that band together to ensure local needs are met.

If you do not participate in any community associations, I highly encourage you to get involved. These organizations speak loudly, are often heard by elected officials and sometimes facilitate real change.

I recently attended a meeting of the Oak Hill Business and Professional Association. The speaker was our very own Travis County Commissioner Karen Huber. If you receive this edition of Community Impact Newspaper, there’s a good chance she represents you in county government.

She discussed heavily debated topics such as the merits of SH 45 SW, the Y at Oak Hill’s engineering quagmire and the recent county redistricting.

This last topic especially caught my attention. Huber’s precinct, Precinct 3, is the largest in terms of area and population. She represents almost half of the county.

How can the average Precinct 3 resident make his or her voice heard when there are 266,926 other people vying for Huber’s attention? How can Precinct 3 make its voice heard when so many people have only one vote on the Commissioners Court?

The Commissioners Court approved redistricting by a 4–1 vote. Only Huber opposed.

It goes to show how important it is that we all get involved. One voice, no matter how loud or powerful, is always stronger when it finds friends.

Travis Baker
tbaker@impactnews.com

Reader Feedback

Avaña-Esquel home development in Circle C Ranch to hold grand opening Aug. 20

more.impactnews.com/14362

“There are already Standard Pacific communities in Austin that are less than five years old where $250,000 will get you a 3,000 square foot house with a greenbelt lot backing up to a pond and half the distance to downtown! Does it really cost $250,000 to build a 1,869 square foot house? I bet it doesn’t! I bet that Stand Pac will make $150,000 pure profit from each sale. Do yourself a favor and buy existing, buy sustainable and quit destroying our precious aquifer to serve your ego as a homeowner.” —Jonkbonk

We at Community Impact Newspaper recognize the need to help those affected by the recent Central Texas wildfires. We encourage our readers to help, also. Your gift to the American Red Cross of Central Texas will support wildfire relief efforts throughout the region. (512) 929-1250, www.centex.redcross.org

The Capital Area Food Bank is also accepting nonperishable food donations and bottled water at 8201 S. Congress Ave., Austin, (512) 282-2111, www.austinfoodbank.org

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July employment trends

Central Texas unemployment—7.6%
No change from June

State unemployment—8.4%*
Up from 8.2%* in June

National unemployment—9.1%*
Down from 9.2%* in June

In Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos, the leisure and hospitality sector added 830 jobs; professional and business services added 1,700 jobs; trade, transportation and utilities lost 800 jobs; government lost 8,100 jobs.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas Workforce Commission

*Seasonally adjusted numbers

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July employment trends

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Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Texas Workforce Commission

*Seasonally adjusted numbers
Now Open

1 Former Austin chef Damon Young opened Albert Oaks, a boutique retirement home, at 7211 Albert Road in September. The nine-bedroom residence offers family-style living and community, chef-prepared dining, an organic garden and walking trails, according to its website. The residence is now accepting reservations. Appointments are appreciated. 425-0655, www.albertoaks.com

2 National homebuilding company Standard Pacific Homes opened a new subdivision, Avaña-Esquel, in Circle C Ranch at the intersection of Escarpment Boulevard and SH 45 in late August. The subdivision has 12 home designs from 1,869 to 3,298 square feet featuring up to six bedrooms and five bathrooms. 888-437-7844, www.standardpacifichomes.com/new-homes/texas/austin/ava-a-esquel.aspx

3 Black Boot Music Shop has opened in the Community Renaissance Market, 6800 West Gate Blvd. The store, owned by Jesse Celenza, offers guitar lessons, albums for sale and instrument repair. 630-2960, www.communityrenaisscemarket.com

4 Cash Store opened a location at 3601 W. William Cannon Drive, Bldg. 4, Ste. 100, on Aug. 19. The business provides emergency cash loans to help customers finance unexpected expenses. 891-0045, www.cashstore.com

5 Cell phone repair and service shop Cell Surgeons has opened in the Community Renaissance Market, 6800 West Gate Blvd. 537-3499, www.communityrenaisscemarket.com

Home-based business Conscious Cupcake has opened in late August. Co-owner Nora Eddings said the bakery’s mission is to “provide beautiful and delicious treats with wholesome, organic ingredients while supporting local farmers.” The business delivers to all of Austin. Catering is also available. 940-782-0654, www.consciouscupcakeaustin.com


On Sept. 12, Mark Williams opened Garage Door Masters. The locally owned and operated company offers garage door and opener installation and repair, custom garage doors, safety consultations and 24-hour emergency service in Austin, Buda, Kyle and San Marcos. Williams has 15 years of garage door experience. 222-3667, www.garagedoormastersaustin.com


8 National American University opened its South Austin campus at 6800 West Gate Blvd., Ste. 102, on Aug. 2. The West Gate Boulevard campus is the regionally accredited school’s second in Austin. The first is located at 13801 Burnet Road, Ste. 300. The campus offers degree programs in business, allied health, information technology and criminal justice, according to the school’s website. 651-4750 www.national.edu/locations/south-austin

9 Yogurt 4 U opened at 3601 W. William Cannon Drive on Aug. 1. The shop sells frozen yogurt, smoothies, bubble tea and other iced drinks. 892-0886

Coming Soon

10 Longhorn Steakhouse is coming to the Southpark Meadows III shopping center. www.longhornsteakhouse.com
11 **TreeHouse**, a home improvement store selling eco-friendly products, is scheduled to open in the former Borders bookstore location at 4477 S. Lamar Blvd. in late October. The 25,000-square-foot location will be the company’s first. www.treehouseonline.com

12 **Zumba Dance Studio** is coming to 500 W. William Cannon Drive. It recently leased a 2,439 square foot facility. www.zumba.com

**Relocations**

13 Kindermusik by Deborah Foster has moved from the Clavire-Werke School of Music on 5900 W. Slaughter Lane, Bldg. D-525, to the Ballet Southwest Academy at 11190 Circle Drive, Ste. 101. The early childhood music and movement program serves children from birth to age 7. 261-5536, www.kinbydeborah.com


**New Management**

15 Nail salon **Tianna Nails** opened Sept. 1 under new management. The salon, located at 719 W. William Cannon Drive, Ste. 113, offers manicures, pedicures and other beauty services. It serves walk-in clients and those who book appointments. 804-0132

**Anniversaries**

16 **Austin Pets Alive** is celebrating its one-year anniversary in September. The nonprofit works to help healthy animals from being euthanized in shelters. 961-6519, www.austinpetsalive.org

17 Small-business incubator **Community Renaissance Market** celebrated its one-year anniversary in late August. The Austin City Council gave a proclamation to the organization at its Aug. 18 meeting.

6800 West Gate Blvd., www.communityrenaissancemarket.com

18 On Sept. 10, **Lux Bakery and Cafe** celebrated its fourth anniversary at 3601 W. William Cannon Drive, Ste. 175. The eatery serves pastries, cookies, cakes, sandwiches, wraps, soups and salads. 891-9850, www.luxbakeryandcafe.com

19 The **Piazza Center for Plastic Surgery and Advanced Skin Care** celebrated its one-year anniversary in September. The practice, located at 7900 FM 1826, Ste. 206, offers facial surgery, liposuction, cosmetic surgery and skin treatments. 288-8200, www.thepiazzacenter.com

20 **Vivero Growers Nursery** is celebrating its one-year anniversary. The nursery, located at 12000 W. Hwy. 290, sells native plants, cacti and trees. 587-4476, www.viverogrowers.com

**Name change**

21 Alamo Drafthouse renamed its newest facility from Alamo South MoPac to **Alamo Slaughter Lane**. The theater, located at 5701 W. Slaughter Lane, is under construction. No estimated completion date has been announced. www.drafthouse.com/austin

22 **Marie Callender’s** closed its 5601 Brodie Lane location in June. The nearest branch is at 9503 Research Blvd., Ste. 400. www.mariecallenders.com

23 **Kim’s Collection** closed its Community Renaissance Market location May 1. The store, located at 8600 West Gate Blvd., sold Asian-themed collectibles.

**In the News**

Bill Elsey, sales director for **Duchman Family Winery**, was named the “Texas Best Sommelier” for 2011 during the Texas Sommelier Conference and Texas Best Sommelier Competition in Irving. 858-20

24 **Lux Bakery and Cafe**, celebrated the business’s four-year anniversary on Sept. 10.

25 **Vivero Growers Nursery** sells native plants.

**Closing Urban Pizz'z**

26 **Lux Bakery and Cafe** announced. www.drafthouse.com/austin

27 The seventh Austin location of the Alamo Drafthouse has changed the theater name to **Alamo Slaughter Lane**. The theater is currently under construction. Officials have not announced an opening date yet.

**National American University** offers classes online and at its newest location on West Gate Boulevard.

**Ann Lux**, owner of **Lux Bakery and Cafe**, celebrated the business’s four-year anniversary on Sept. 10.

**Katherine Cain**, owner of one-year-old business **Vivero Growers Nursery**, sells native plants.

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1626 Manchaca United Methodist Church, 1011 FM 1626 • 282-7274 • www.manchacaumc.org

28 KVET Free Texas Music Series
Texas country musician Jack Ingram performs as part of the 10th annual KVET Free Texas Music Series. Whiskey Myers opens the concert. Concerts are held every Wednesday night and are open to the public. 6-10 p.m. • Free • 12225 W. Hwy. 290 301-4648 • www.nuttybrown.com

22 Bowie High School FFA Alumni Dance
The Bowie Future Farmers of America will hold its annual barbecue dinner and dance from 6:30–11:30 p.m. at the Painted Horse Pavilion, 1750 FM 1626 in Buda. The event will feature music, dancing and live and silent auctions. $20, children younger than 10 free • 426-7705 www.bowieffaalumni.org

282-7274 • www.manchacaumc.org

10 a.m.–1 p.m. • $15 • Jack Allen’s Kitchen, 7720 W. Hwy. 71 • www.ohbpa.org

9 Rainwater Revival
The second annual Rainwater Revival festival takes place at Roger Hanks Park in Dripping Springs to help raise awareness of the benefits of rainwater conservation. Speakers will hold seminars on relevant topics in conservation. • 10 a.m.–7 p.m. • Free • Roger Hanks Park in Dripping Springs 1.2 miles west of RR 12 on W. Hwy 290 • 7720 W. Hwy. 71 • www.rainwaterrevival.com

Health and Wellness Fair
Manchaca United Methodist Church is hosting the annual Health and Wellness Fair in the Family Life Center, offering free health screenings, including total cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and vision screening. Flu shots will also be available and administered by H-E-B. Patrons should bring Medicare or insurance information. 9 a.m.–1 p.m. Manchaca United Methodist Church, 1501 N. RR 620, Austin 266-5666 • www.faradayskitchenstore.com

Online Calendar
Find more or submit Southwest Austin events at www.impactnews.com/swa/calendar.

For a full list of Central Texas events visit www.impactnews.com/austin-metro/calendar.

To have Southwest Austin events included in the print edition, they must be submitted online by the second Friday of the month.
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2011 bond referendum
Voters weigh $215M in roads, parks projects

By Joe Olivieri

This November, Travis County voters will decide whether to approve two ballot propositions for $215 million worth of roadway and parks improvements.

The 2011 bond referendum includes projects to widen roads, fortify existing road drainage, enhance parkland and purchase more open space.

The county would pay for the work by issuing bonds over seven years, said Jessica Rio, Travis County assistant budget director.

In February, the Travis County Commissioners Court set up a 15-member Citizens Bond Advisory Committee to gauge whether a referendum was needed and how large it should be.

The committee met for seven months, held six public hearings and received hundreds of letters. It whittled down a 120-project wish list totaling $638 million to 36 projects totaling $205,649,433, according to court documents.

The Commissioners Court adjusted the project list to $214,945,000.

That does not include two projects at FM 969 and FM 1626: the county will pay the estimated $28.2 million bill for the two projects up front and be partially reimbursed by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Steve Manilla, Transportation and Natural Resources Department executive director, said he thought the referendum process went well.

“We were as transparent as you can get,” he said. “We had a good debate. The committee came up with a very good list. It gave consideration to projects spread out throughout the county based on present and future needs. It’s multimodal too; it includes bike and pedestrian projects.”

Court clarifications

Before accepting the committee’s final report Aug. 9, the Commissioners Court made three adjustments: it removed work on Lohmans Ford Road, added a Taylor Lane project and expanded the scope of Bee Creek Road improvements.

At a subsequent meeting, the Commissioners Court discussed negotiations to acquire the Pedernales River corridor property.

In addition to the $20 million estimated cost, the court considered offering the current owners life estates on 50 acres and the option to lease the remaining 750 acres for grazing rights for $5,000.

A life estate allows someone to live on a property for the duration of his or her life and then transfer the property to another entity upon his or her death.

How much will it cost?

Residents may figure out how the referendum will increase their property taxes by using a calculator on the county’s website, www.co.travis.tx.us/citizens_bond_committee/tax_calculator.asp.

Rio said residents should use the taxable value of their property, minus deductions, when using the calculator. Although the calculator uses 2013 estimates, 2012 tax values will still be helpful, she said.

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Map not to scale

The November bond referendum will include 36 projects—27 roadway, drainage, bridge and bicycle pedestrian projects ($120,486,887) and nine parks and land conservation projects ($73.8 million). Inflation ($18.51 million) and issuance costs ($2,036,133) bring the total to $214,945,000.

Projects and their estimated costs

Safety, bridge, drainage, bicycle and pedestrian projects

1. Austin Colony to FM 969, $3.73 million
2. Old San Antonio Road/Onion Creek bridge, $2.19 million
3. Old Hwy. 20 bridge No. 155, $1.4 million
4. Hunters Bend Road sidewalks, $293,000
5. Flint Rock Road, $3.72 million
6. Weiss Lane bridge No. 229, $730,000
7. Rowe Lane, $1.46 million
8. McNeill Road drainage, $2.77 million
9. Lost Creek sidewalks, $500,000
10. Big Sandy Drive at Long Hollow Creek, $794,000
11. Hwy. 290-Circle Drive intersection improvements, $810,000
12. Bee Creek Road, $1.24 million

Roadway capacity

13. Unspecified road reconstruction and standard roads, $4.49 million*
14. Bicycle safety projects, $3 million*
15. Sidewalks on El Rey Boulevard, $600,000
16. Wildhorse connector, $7.9 million
17. FM 973-Blake Manor Road connector, $7.87 million
18. East Slaughter Lane, $6.5 million
19. Blake-Manor Road, $12.44 million
20. South Tuscany Way, $3.25 million
21. William Cannon Drive, $8.6 million
22. Cameron Road, $13.76 million
23. Wells Branch Parkway, $7.01 million
24. Weiss Lane, $6.73 million
25. Arterial A expansion, $1.55 million

Parks and land conservation projects

26. Bee Creek Road, $0.3 million
27. Widen Taylor Lane, $7.66 million
28. Arkansas Bend/Dink Pearson parks, $8.5 million
29. Eastern Creek greenways, $15 million
30. Land conservation easements, $7.5 million*
31. Onion Creek greenway, $12 million
32. Pedernales River corridor, $20 million
33. Timber Creek subdivision, $2.5 million
34 A-D. Eastern Travis County parks improvements, $2.2 million
35. New Northeast Metro Park entrance, $3.2 million
36. Northeast Metro Park improvements, $3 million

* Locations not specified

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More coverage.
Austin Water enacts Stage 2 watering restrictions

The extreme drought in Central Texas has prompted Austin Water to enact Stage 2 mandatory watering restrictions beginning Sept. 6. Stage 2 restrictions include: watering allowed one day per week, hand-watering allowed anytime, no automatic irrigation after 10 a.m. on a designated watering day, vehicle washing on a designated day before 10 a.m., no charity car washes, no water served at restaurants unless requested and no washing of sidewalks, driveways or other paved areas. The watering schedule is:

- Residential odd addresses, Saturday;
- Residential even addresses, Sunday;
- Commercial and multifamily odd addresses, Tuesday;
- Commercial and multifamily even addresses, Friday.

County to pave Rancho Alto Road

The Travis County Commissioners Court approved closing Rancho Alto Road from October through March 2012 to reconstruct and pave 350 feet of the road. Construction is slated to begin Oct. 1 and would continue for five months until March 15, 2012, or project completion.

The project is estimated to cost $143,069. The county will pay 80 percent, or $114,455, and the Rancho Alto Homeowners Association agreed to pay $28,613 toward the cost of construction, according to court documents.

Sunset Valley to approve budget

The Sunset Valley City Council was scheduled to approve its 2011–12 budget Sept. 20.

The total operating budget is $8.02 million, up from $7.97 million in 2010–11. The city plans to collect $4,093,238, the same amount of revenue as last year, and had planned to allocate $3,616,098 as of Sept. 6. Most of the city's revenue comes from sales tax ($3.88 million). The big expenses are the Sunset Valley Police Department ($1 million), general government ($482,850) and public works ($438,646).

Austin Energy adds 103 plug-in charging stations around the city

Electric vehicles have many more locations to charge up with the addition of 103 plug-in charging stations throughout the city. The Level 2 (220/240 volts) charging stations are located near restaurants, hotels, medical facilities, educational institutions, retail stores and public facilities. A map with all locations is available at www.pluginpartners.org. Austin Energy offers a $25 six-month subscription swipe card for unlimited charging at any network location. A credit card can be used for $2 per hour of charging. Station locations include Austin Community College and H-E-B.

Travis County

County declares local disaster

In response to the recent wildfires, the Travis County Commissioners Court unanimously declared a local disaster at its Sept. 13 meeting.

In a letter to Gov. Rick Perry, Travis County Judge Samuel Biscoe called the fire threat to homes and businesses a "significant potential public health and safety hazard." He added that this fire season is of such severity and magnitude that "an effective response is beyond the capability of fire departments in Travis County to recover without supplementary state and/ or federal assistance," he wrote.

Meetings

- **Austin City Council**
  Austin City Hall, 301 W. Second St.
  974-2497; www.ci.austin.tx.us/council
  Oct. 6 and 20, 10 a.m.

- **Travis County Commissioners Court**
  314 11th St., Austin
  854-9425; www.co.travis.tx.us/commissioners_court
  Meetings are every Tuesday at 9 a.m.

- **Sunset Valley City Council**
  Sunset Valley City Hall, 3205 Jones Road, 892-1383; www.sunsetvalley.org,
  Oct. 4 and 18, 6 p.m.
Austin Energy
Continued from 11

Council approval process goes as the utility hopes, implementation of the new rates may occur as early as January.

The residential segment
According to AE's cost-of-service study, the residential customer segment makes up $107 million of the $131 million revenue deficit, urging the need for a 28.7 percent increase in the residential class.

AE has outlined four increased rate options for residential users that will be considered by City Council. Depending on usage, and which option is chosen, the rates will change a residential customer's bill by as much as 60 percent or as little as 5 percent.

In comparison, commercial and industrial users, depending on usage, face a change as high as 22 percent or as low as 1 percent.

Nineteen of AE's large industrial users have fixed rates that have been under contract since 2007 and will not end until 2015, Austin Energy spokesman Ed Clark said. These 19 users are classified by their use of 3 megawatts or more of energy at any given time. A megawatt is 1,000 kilowatts; the average house uses about 6 kilowatts of energy at any given time.

Even if the rate redesign was implemented in January 2012, the utility would have a $30 million deficit for the 2011–12 fiscal year, a $75 million deficit for the 2012–13 fiscal year, and ultimately would not break even until 2016, Clark said. Until the 19 large industrial user contracts expire in 2015, they account for $20 million of the deficit every year. Their rates would then be raised in 2015 to meet the $20 million needed.

Market evolution defers old methods
Electric Utility Commission member Linda Shaw joined the commission in 1994, the moment the commission began a lengthy series of meetings concerning the last rate redesign.

Shaw said as more utilities become deregulated across the state, the competitive market rises, resulting in sales and buying of electricity based more on who has the lowest price and not the best long-term goal.

"If you charge too much for your energy, if you put it out there to sell and it costs you more than what the market bears—you can't sell your idle generation," Shaw said.

In the past, AE has paid for expansion with cash, but recently the utility has had to borrow more and more.

"We have gotten to the point we don't have cash to do those things; we have to borrow," Weis said. "Cost of transmission has gone up and a piece of a copper wire has gone up. All of these costs have gone up significantly. We have not addressed that and that is why it's time."

The Electric Utility Commission can only give guidance to the City Council and has no hand in the final decision. Shaw expects that the rate redesign will not pass through City Council smoothly, however, and it might be appealed to Texas' Public Utility Commission.

"There has already been some inclinations [by the Public Involvement Committee] that they feel rates are not fair," Shaw said. "It will be appealed to the PUC, which, of course, would examine everything."

The public's perception
Carol Biedrzycki, executive director of Texas Ratepayers' Organization to Save Energy, said her group sent a letter to City Council, signed by 22 citizens representing 13 groups, outlining their disapproval of the rate redesign.

Biedrzycki said the rate increase is being allocated disproportionately to residential customers and was formed to reward the industrial class.

Weis said 60 percent of AE's customer base uses less than 1,000 kilowatt hours per month and are paying $6 a month for a customer charge. The monthly charge may increase from $6 to a value as high as $30 or as low as $10 for the various residential options.

"This huge customer charge ... also disproportionately impacts low-income customers who can least afford the rate increase," Biedrzycki said.

AE's Nov. 5, 2010, affordability study analyzed the residential electricity burden felt by customers from 2006 to 2008.

Customers with homes that fell under 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold, with a family of four income limit of $10,514 per year, paid 39.3 percent of their income per year on their electric bill. In contrast, customers in the 51 percent to 100 percent threshold, who make $21,027 per year, paid 10.5 percent of their income per year on their electric bill.

The study details the burden for several thresholds, including homes that make $105,135 per year and that pay only 2.3 percent of their income on their electric bill. The results made researchers wonder at what level does any utility-related burdens begin to affect public policy.

"A number of observers have used 6 percent as a potential normative threshold upon which households paying above this amount are faced with electricity burden," the study said. "Below 150 percent of the poverty threshold, households experience a very high electricity burden and perhaps what a reasonable observer would suggest is deserving of public policy intervention."

Going forward
The Electric Utility Commission will meet on Oct. 3 and 17, after which the rate redesign and the commission's recommendations will go to the City Council in November and December. Approval of the rate redesign may be as soon as early December with implementation by January.

Apparent dissatisfaction of the rate redesign suggests that the rate redesign will likely reach the PUC before being adopted. If so, Austin Energy's goal of a January 2012 implementation may drift even further.
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not return calls seeking comment.

The city contributed $11.5 million—using $11.1 million from the November 2006 bond and $400,000 from the Barton Springs Redevelopment Ordinance.

Standard Pacific Homes, which owns the northern portion of Avana-Èsquel, contributed the last $300,000 needed for funding, said Jeff Francell, the Nature Conservancy’s real estate director.

The Nature Conservancy helped to get the land under contract.

The property is the last piece in a more than 12-year-long effort to acquire a contiguous 9,000-acre corridor for conservation that includes city-owned land and environmental easements essential to water conservation.

“It is a long-sought-after goal, and the opportunity to be able to purchase this property met a number of criteria that for future generations will make a huge difference,” said Junie Plummer, a property agent in the Office of Real Estate Services with the City of Austin.

According to a city statement, the project accomplishes two major conservation objectives: to safeguard one of the region’s most critical areas for water filtration, and to bring the 9,000-acre block of conservation land together.

Future for the development

Plummer said that the plans to acquire the land have been a difficult process over the years.

In 2000, Greg Bradley, the man behind the master-planned community Circle C, made an agreement with the City of Austin that included enough grandfathered impervious cover—or land that is allowed to be covered by buildings, roads and parking lots—to allow for hundreds of homes to be built on the property.

The land had gone through many different owners, was foreclosed on and sold in parcels.

Standard Pacific owns the northern portion of the land and opened the subdivision Avana-Èsquel in early August as an extension of the Circle C Ranch master-planned community.

The urgency to conserve the land, Plummer said, was because of the extensive number of caves, sinkholes and other environmentally sensitive resources that would have been negatively affected had the development gone forward on the south side of the property.

“Without a subdivision, there are few opportunities for man-made provisions and pollution,” she said.

The subdivision plans would have allowed for approximately 500 homes on 58.5 acres of impervious cover, the equivalent of 2.5 million square feet of home space.

The area was planned to move forward with a housing development but had not been sold.

Standard Pacific Homes was in support of the project to conserve the land, Francell said.

“Standard Pacific was very supportive and did everything to see this property preserved, including contributing $300,000 to the developer out of Dallas who they bought their property from. They were excited about seeing the land preserved, which is unusual.”

Standard Pacific did not return calls seeking comment.

Proposed Violet Crown Trails

The City of Austin, in partnership with the Hill Country Conservancy, has been working toward the creation of the Violet Crown Trail. The trail, formerly known as the Walk for a Day trail, would allow for more than 30 miles of connecting trails throughout the area.

“The Violet Crown Trail is regional trail system starting in Austin at Zilker Park right by the Barton Springs pool, following the greenbelt and turning southward through Sunset Valley, connecting parks, schools, neighborhoods, retail,” said George Cofer, the executive director of the Hill Country Conservancy. “The new land will connect at the Veloway Trail at the Lady Bird Johnson Center and goes into Hays County.”

The trail is being implemented in three phases. Phases 1 and 2 are expected to be complete by 2014.

The new land purchase, which is Phase 3, will allow for the trail to connect from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, located on La Crosse Avenue, through Hays County.

“Now that the city owns the acreage, we have some great opportunities to revisit where the trail can run,” Cofer said. “It is going to be an official route of the trail, we just don’t know where exactly yet. The official maps are still conceptual.”

Cofer said there is still a lot to learn about the land within the 611 acres, adding that the purchase is an exciting addition to the regional trail plans. There is currently no timeline as to when the entire trail system will be complete.

“It is going to be a much better trail user experience,” Cofer said. “HCC, the city and the other partners’ primary goal is to provide a trail user experience that also respects the conservation values of the sensitive lands.”

Purchasing the 611 acres is a step forward in accomplishing that goal, he said.
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Redistricting
Continued from 11

“For the purpose of electing people, those new boundaries take effect in November for next year’s elections,” he said.

The court and the law

The Travis County Commissioners Court runs, and makes policy for, the county government.

County residents are represented by one of four commissioners—Ron Davis (Precinct 1), Sarah Eckhardt (Precinct 2), Huber (Precinct 3) or Gomez (Precinct 4)—who serve four-year terms.

Federal law requires all single-member precincts to update their borders every 10 years when new census data is available.

Each commissioner’s precinct should ideally have the exact same population, but the law allows up to a 10 percent difference between the populations of the largest and smallest precincts.

The Federal Voting Rights Act states that if a minority population is the majority in a commissioner’s precinct, redistricting cannot significantly reduce its influence.

Each of the 17 maps the court considered met the Voting Rights Act’s guidelines, said George Korb of Korb Research, the county’s redistricting consulting firm.

The adopted map has an 8.3 percent difference between the largest and smallest precinct populations. Precinct 3 has 266,927—10,860 more than the ideal of 256,067. Precinct 4 has 245,573—10,494 fewer than the ideal.

Who moved

Each commissioner’s precinct changed borders as a result of redistricting.

The following areas moved from Precinct 3 to Precinct 4:
- A portion of 309—Tanglewood Forest
- Most of 321—Hillcrest, Great Oaks at Slaughter Creek and Olympic Heights
- 323—Swanson’s Ranchettes, The Hollow at Slaughter Creek
- 355—Castlewood Forest
- 356—Westwood Heights

The following areas moved from Precinct 4 to Precinct 3:
- 444—East 11th Street to West Cesar Chavez Street between Colorado Street and I-35
- 445—West 12th Street to West Third Street between Colorado Street and Shoal Creek Boulevard
- 455—Area between West Gate Boulevard, William Cannon Drive, Manchaca Road and West Stassney Lane
- 462—South Lamar Boulevard from Lady Bird Lake to West Oltorf Street

Racial makeup

During the redistricting process, the Commissioners Court weighed several criteria, such as trends in political affiliation, projected future growth and population statistics about racial concentrations.

All four precints supported President Barack Obama in the 2008 election and Democratic candidate Bill White for governor in 2010. In both races, Huber’s precinct did so by the smallest margins.

Eckhardt said she gave downtown areas to Huber to compensate for Democratic-leaning precincts Huber gave to Gomez.

The adopted map grew Precinct 4’s majority Hispanic population from 56 percent to 56.1 percent.

“In the west, I took in a lot of Hispanics,” Gomez said. “Those precincts have a lot in common [with Precinct 4]: a common culture, a common language and education.”

Gomez said that it matters to some constituents that their representative shares the same race or socio-economic background.

“In the minority community, I think it’s important because of the culture, language and history,” Gomez said. “There’s a need to be heard, and there’s an understanding that’s presumed to be there that [a minority representative] would know what they’re talking about.”

Commissioner reactions

Gomez said that although redistricting is “always a tough situation,” it went well.

“[Precinct 4] had to grow,” she said. “It was and remains the smallest precinct. I couldn’t afford to give up any population. I was told that for every precinct I gave up, I’d have to take two to make up for it.”

Huber said she was unhappy with how the redistricting process went and that she had been “out-voted.”

“I have 14 municipalities in my precinct [not including Austin]. Think of all of the municipal players involved,” she said. “I have a section of downtown Austin now. Think of all of the transportation and mobility issues I have to be a part of now.”

She said her precinct has nine emergency service precints, four chambers of commerce and six school precincts, not including Austin.

“I wish we could have done better,” she said.

Comment at impactnews.com

Precinct borders, before and after

The Travis County Commissioners Court was required to redraw its borders to match new census data.

On Sept. 13, the Commissioners Court accepted a new map and submitted it for federal approval.

The map on the left reflects the old precinct borders. The map on the right reflects the new precinct borders.

Population changes
- Precinct 1: 244,108 to 250,335
- Precinct 2: 250,303 to 261,431
- Precinct 3: 299,842 to 266,927
- Precinct 4: 229,923 to 245,573

Source: Travis County

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**City of Austin, Kennedy Center partner on long-range arts program**

By Joe Olivieri

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts selected Austin for its Any Given Child program, which creates a long-range arts education plan for students in kindergarten through eighth grade, drawing from the city’s local arts and community resources.

City and school district officials announced the partnership at a news conference at Austin City Hall. The program “seeks to bring access, balance and equity to each child’s arts education, using an affordable model that combines the resources of the school district, local arts groups and the Kennedy Center,” according to a statement from the Kennedy Center.

Kennedy Center staff will conduct a roughly nine-month audit of existing arts education needs and available school and community resources, it states.

Darrell Ayers, vice president of education at the Kennedy Center, said the audit will build off of existing local research and studies to duplicate work.

“Our goal is not sustainability, but ... thrive-ability,” he said.

Ayers said that combining arts within the school curriculum can help students stay more engaged, which is important to the Kennedy Center.

“[Children] learn more, and the arts help them stay more engaged,” she said. Austin is the seventh city to be selected for the Any Given Child program. It joins Sacramento, Calif.; Springfield, Mo.; Portland, Ore.; Las Vegas; Tulsa, Okla. and Sarasota, Fla.

**District prepares for STAAR exam, more tests, tougher standards**

By Taylor Short and Amy Deis

Next spring, hundreds of thousands of students across the state will tackle the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness—or STAAR test. The new exam will have more demanding requirements and several more tests than the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

Students in grades 3 through 8 will take the STAAR next year, but the roughly 350,009 ninth graders statewide who just started the school year will be the first class required to pass 12 end-of-course (EOC) exams to graduate from high school.

“Since students should master the [state-mandated curriculum] in order to receive credit on subjects taken in high school, and since the EOCs will test that level of mastery, the EOC approach gives a better picture of what students have learned than did the TAKS exit-level exams,” said Mark Billingsley, director of systemwide testing for Austin Independent School District.

In 2009, state lawmakers mandated the Texas Education Agency to develop a new state assessment test.

The new exam—known as the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness—or STAAR test. The new exam will assess students’ mastery of the state’s academic standards and will be used to measure college and career readiness.

By Kate Hull

The Austin Independent School District board of trustees approved a $703.3 million general fund budget for fiscal year 2012 at its Aug. 22 meeting.

The board set the total tax rate of $1.242 per $100 of assessed value and reinstated tax breaks for historic properties for one year only.

“The district initiated a long and rigorous budget planning process,” Superintendent Meria Carstarphen said. “While we haven’t all, as a school community, agreed on every decision, we do believe that we have placed the best budget before you to support the work of the district’s strategic plan.”

Trustees spoke out in support of the budget; however, some members expressed frustration with the difficult process of drafting the budget because of state cuts to education. The total state budget reductions will decrease funding for AISD for 2011–12 by $35.6 million, according to the AISD budget. For this current fiscal year, the state’s funding reductions were offset by a one-time infusion of $13.8 million given to the district from the federal Education Jobs Fund.

District 7 Trustee Robert Schneider expressed support of the budget but said he was less than satisfied with state’s cuts to public education, which has caused the cutting of various successful programs.

“I do support the budget, but I continue to wish the state would have funded education better, but that is, unfortunately, not the case,” he said.

Board president Mark Williams referred to the district as a nearly billion-dollar business. With an adopted budget of more than $972 million, AISD is required to give local funds to the state as part of Texas’ Robin Hood law. Chapter 41 requires property-rich districts to redistribute property taxes to property-poor districts.

The approved tax rate will remain at $1.079 per $100 of assessed value for maintenance and operations; however, the interest and sinking fund used to cover debt for bond programs will increase from $0.148 to $0.163 per $100 of assessed value.

Under the budget, the total tax rate will be $1.242 per $100, which will account for an increase of $5,152,451 from the 2011 fiscal year, according to the district’s budget plan. The maintenance and operations tax rate stayed the same for a fourth year.

The board also approved tax exemptions for historic properties in Austin. AISD put together a list of eligible properties, which is available at www.austinisd.org.

**AISD budget approved**

By Taylor Short and Amy Deis

Next spring, hundreds of thousands of students across the state will tackle the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness—or STAAR test. The new exam will have more demanding requirements and several more tests than the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

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In 2009, state lawmakers mandated the Texas Education Agency to develop a new state assessment test.
**DISTRICT SCORES BY GRADE**

2011 TAKS results (sum of all grades tested)

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<th>Subject</th>
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**2011 TAKS results (sum of all grades tested)**

Grade 3 | Reading 94% | Math 88%
Grade 4 | Reading 86% | Math 89%
Grade 5 | Reading 83% | Math 49%
Grade 6 | Reading 80% | Math 80%
Grade 7 | Reading 80% | Math 78%
Grade 8 | Reading 87% | Math 75%
Grade 9 | Reading 90% | Math 71%
Grade 10 | English language arts 87% | Math 75%
Grade 11 | English language arts 91% | Math 89%

This feeder chart only contains information about schools in southwest Austin, as defined by Community Impact Newspaper.
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<th>2010 economically disadvantaged</th>
<th>2010 TAKS results by campus</th>
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<tr>
<td>Blazer</td>
<td>8601 Vertex Blvd.</td>
<td>841-8800</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boone</td>
<td>8101 Crockettwood Blvd.</td>
<td>414-2537</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bryker Woods</td>
<td>3309 Kerby Lane</td>
<td>414-2054</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>9400 Texas Oaks Drive</td>
<td>841-6900</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Casis</td>
<td>2710 Exposition Blvd.</td>
<td>414-2062</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clayton</td>
<td>7525 La Crosse Ave.</td>
<td>841-9200</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Cowan</td>
<td>2817 Kentish Drive</td>
<td>841-2700</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cunningham</td>
<td>2200 Berkeley Ave.</td>
<td>414-2067</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Galindo</td>
<td>3800 S. Second St.</td>
<td>414-1756</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joslin</td>
<td>4500 Manchaca Road</td>
<td>414-2094</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiker</td>
<td>5913 La Crosse Ave.</td>
<td>414-2584</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kocurek</td>
<td>9800 Curlew Drive</td>
<td>414-2547</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathews</td>
<td>906 West Lynn St.</td>
<td>414-4406</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Menchaca</td>
<td>12120 Manchaca Road</td>
<td>414-2333</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mills</td>
<td>6201 Davis Lane</td>
<td>841-2400</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oak Hill</td>
<td>6101 Patton Ranch Road</td>
<td>414-2336</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Odom</td>
<td>1010 Turtle Creek Blvd.</td>
<td>414-2388</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>89.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palm</td>
<td>7601 Dixie Drive</td>
<td>414-2545</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Patton</td>
<td>6001 Westcreek Drive</td>
<td>414-1780</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pease</td>
<td>1106 Rio Grande St.</td>
<td>414-4428</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perez</td>
<td>7500 S. Pleasant Valley Road</td>
<td>841-9100</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pleasant Hill</td>
<td>6405 Circle S Road</td>
<td>414-4453</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Elmo</td>
<td>600 W. St. Elmo Road</td>
<td>414-4477</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunset Valley</td>
<td>3000 Jones Road</td>
<td>414-2392</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>500 Mairo St.</td>
<td>414-2525</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zilker</td>
<td>1900 Bluebonnet Lane</td>
<td>414-2327</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>Exemplary</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MIDDLE SCHOOLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>4020 Lost Oasis Hollow</td>
<td>414-4990</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bedichek</td>
<td>6808 Bill Hughes Road</td>
<td>414-3265</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Covington</td>
<td>3700 Convict Hill Road</td>
<td>414-3276</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gorzynski</td>
<td>7412 W. Slaughter Lane</td>
<td>841-8600</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1,034</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>O. Henry</td>
<td>2610 W. 10th St.</td>
<td>414-3228</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1,025</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Paredes</td>
<td>10100 S. Mary Moore Searight Drive</td>
<td>841-6800</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>4801 Monterey Oaks Blvd.</td>
<td>841-6700</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIGH SCHOOLS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akins</td>
<td>10701 S. First St.</td>
<td>841-9900</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,741</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>1715 W. Cesar Chavez St.</td>
<td>414-2505</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2,315</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowie</td>
<td>4103 Slaughter Lane</td>
<td>414-5247</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2,891</td>
<td>Recognized</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Crockett</td>
<td>5601 Manchaca Road</td>
<td>414-2532</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>1211 E. Oltorf St.</td>
<td>414-2527</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>79%</td>
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Dripping Springs ISD

While Dripping Springs Independent School District continues to deliver strong academic progress for low costs, it was unable to hold on to last year’s rare five-star designation on the 2011 Financial Allocation Study for Texas.

The district received four-and-a-half stars in the new survey, released in mid-September.

Created by the state comptroller’s office, the FAST study measures district and campus resource allocation and the relationship between allocations and student achievement.

Susan Combs, Texas comptroller of public accounts, said that five-star schools made the most improvements for the least cost. Conversely, one-star schools spent the most money for the least return on their investment.

In 2009–10, the district earned a composite academic progress percentile of 94 on a 1 to 100 scale and a “low” spending index. It spent $6,995 per student.

In 2008–09, the district earned an 87 composite progress percentile and a “very low” spending index. It spent $7,005 per student last year.

District Superintendent Dr. Mard Herrick said the two areas used to determine the rating—financial efficiency and student achievement—are traditionally strong in Dripping Springs.

“We are proud to be recognized among the top-rated districts in Central Texas,” he said.

Last year, Dripping Springs was the only Central Texas district, and one of 43 public school district and charter schools statewide, to earn the five-star rating, District Information Officer Dale Whitaker said.

This year, 46 schools earned the top ranking.

By Joe Olivieri

Dripping Springs' three elementary schools feed into its middle and high schools
EXEMPLARY EDUCATION.
HILL COUNTRY STYLE.

• Award-winning Dripping Springs School District
• On-site Exemplary rated elementary school
• Recreation center with resort-style swimming pool
• Miles of hike & bike trails, acres of open space and neighborhood parks
• 16 miles from downtown Austin: Named the “#1 City for the Next Decade” by Kiplinger

www.belterratexas.com • 151 Trinity Hills Drive, Austin, TX 78737 • 512.301.5000

Recreation center, pools, trails, parks and related amenities will be phased over the life of the project and may not be available immediately. No exact timing has been projected for completion of amenities. The entire property has not been subdivided or platted. Belterra reserves the right to change the use, design and configuration of all or any part of the property at anytime.
The days of the wide-open ranges in big-city Texas regions may be gone, but nestled in the Hill Country, Austin residents can still saddle up a horse and enjoy a ride with Texas Trail Rides.

Thirteen-year-old Ty Johnson decided he wanted to share a hobby he loved. He transformed his family’s property off of FM 1826 into a traditional trail riding experience with the help of family friend and seasoned horse rider Kristina Decker.

“When the Johnsons moved out here six years ago, it was just a family operation,” Decker said. “But people kept coming by, pulling up in their minivans and asking if they could ride. If you come to Austin, there really were not places to trail ride unless you leave the Hill Country.”

Seeing an opportunity to bring trail riding to Southwest Austin residents and tourists, the family operation opened for business in 2009.

Hidden off the road, the Johnsons’ property is across from a 900-acre nature preserve with scenic views of the Austin skyline, rolling hills and rugged landscape. Johnson said that one of his goals for the trail rides was to give riders the opportunity to experience Texas and learn how to ride a horse. The rides are done in an open-range style, giving guests the chance to ride based on their skill level and explore the open fields instead of a “nose-to-tail” single-file ride.

“I have always loved horses and had that passion for them. Once we moved here, and I had a horse living in my backyard, I realized how much I really did love them. I wanted to share that with other people,” Johnson said.

Starting Oct. 1, Texas Trail Rides is expanding its services to a full-fledged riding center, giving locals the opportunity to not only ride, but also hone their skills and learn how to advance as a rider. The business has five employees: Johnson, who is the head wrangler, and four horse trainers who instruct new riders.

The ranch has eight horses that the public may ride.

Decker said each horse is kid-friendly and extremely safe. Johnson and Decker have trained the horses to be comfortable with any type of rider and specialized in helping retired horses—racing and rodeo—find a second home on the property.

Texas Trail Rides initially began the business catering to tourists at area hotels. Johnson has taken large groups from as far away as Sweden who have not only never ridden a horse, but are first-time visitors to Texas.

The current clientele, however, has expanded to an equal amount of tourists and nearby neighborhood families who want to share the outdoor experience with their children.

Decker said they have a lot of families come in for rides from the nearby Circle C subdivision and many have become regular riders.

With rides nearly seven days a week, Johnson stays busy juggling his school schedule, football practices and other activities.

But trail riding, he said, will always be a big part of his life.
Railroad Bar-B-Que
Hill Country family serves up plates of Americana

By Kate Hull

In Alabama, good barbecue means slow-cooked pork. In South Carolina, the four staple sauces reign supreme. But in Texas, beef brisket is king.

Since 1982, the Sherrill brothers have served up their family’s signature slow-smoked brisket at Railroad Bar-B-Que off of FM 1626 in Manchaca.

Co-owner Dan Sherrill said the key to the family’s success has been the family’s commitment to quality meat and consistent preparation.

“[Our family] loves barbecue and it has always been a family favorite,” Sherrill said. “Different foods become trendy and leave, but barbecue over the years has remained tried and true.

“[Barbecue] is an icon, no matter where you go in the United States,” he continued. “It is that unique little piece of Americana that never changes.”

Sherrill and his brother Paul opened Railroad Bar-B-Que almost 30 years ago in Southwest Austin. The restaurant, named for the nearby tracks, quickly attracted loyal customers who regularly dine there to this day, Sherrill said.

In 1983, the family was able to open a second location down the line at 107 E. Center St. in Kyle.

The first two locations are relatively small—seating about 100 patrons—and have a rustic atmosphere. Americana memorabilia covers the walls, and the smell of mesquite wood fills the room.

The family uses a mesquite wood smoker to slow-cook the briskets, pork, sausage and other meats. The signature beef brisket rub is a secret family recipe that negates the need for any sauce.

Although Sherrill said Railroad Bar-B-Que serves sauce, Texas-style barbecue is more focused on rubs and meat preparation and can stand alone.

In November 2010, the family opened a third location in Driftwood.

That location is much bigger and is becoming the restaurant’s flagship location, Paul Sherrill said.

“We tried to carry on the spirit of the original stores with upgrading to large-screen TVs so people could watch sports while they are having a great Texas barbecue experience,” he said.

The Driftwood location is home to Railroad Bar-B-Que’s full-service catering business. It offers options for small events and large-scale weddings. The Sherrills have expanded the catering menu to a variety of other food genres with items including fajitas, spaghetti and bacon-wrapped scallops. The catering business serves Austin and the Hill Country.

Running the three Railroad Bar-B-Que locations is still all in the family. Dan Sherrill’s son, Nathan, and his nephew, Gerald, help manage the storefronts.

Sherrill said the restaurant has seen a number of regulars turn to Railroad Bar-B-Que as their neighborhood barbecue joint.

“This is something that has given us the longevity and will continue to always be true about barbecue—it is a really personal experience,” Sherrill said. “You really do develop a relationship with people and it is a great journey.”

Railroad Bar-B-Que
727 FM 1626, Manchaca
282-3288
www.rrbbq.com
Twitter: @Railroadbbq

Popular Items
Meats are served by the pound, with sides, family-style feeding three to six, on plates or as a sandwich. Prices vary.

- Beef brisket by the pound, slow-smoked with mesquite, $10.69
- Sherrill family creamy coleslaw, $3.49 per pint
- Banana pudding, Dan Sherrill’s favorite dessert
- Daily pies by the slice and cobbler are also customer favorites

Texas-style brisket barbecue
From Alabama to South Carolina, barbecue has a style and technique that is synonymous with the state it is being charred and smoked to a juicy perfection in. For Texas, that means brisket with little to no sauce. The beef brisket is known for being tender, moist and melt-in-your-mouth good.

For more than a quarter century, Railroad Bar-B-Que has made its name in the Texas scene by slow-cooking barbecue using mesquite wood and its signature rub is a secret family recipe.
Hershel Lee
Travis County fire marshal

By Joe Olivieri
Hershel Lee has been the Travis County fire marshal since 2009. He is responsible for investigating fires and reviewing, permitting and inspecting construction plans in the unincorporated areas of Travis County.

Additionally, his office facilitates public education, oversees a juvenile fire intervention program and serves as a resource to the county government.

Lee’s team has worked with the Austin Fire Department, emergency service districts and neighboring departments in the response to wildfires at Steiner Ranch and Moon Glow in Leander.

Lee’s first memory of fire was watching a forest fire near his East Texas home at age 11 or 12. He has been a peace officer and a firefighter, and has investigated fires since 1999.

“After seven or eight years of fighting fire, it piqued my interest about how we can stop this devastation, this destruction that people suffer,” he said.

How are we doing in terms of the drought index?
The drought index average is right at 783 in Travis County [on Sept. 7]. Some places are as high as 790. That’s on a scale of 0-800 with zero is completely saturated and 800 being a complete lack of moisture.

Texas Forest Service monitors it in several areas of the county. It has to do with the measure of moisture in the ground.

How many fires are we seeing each day in Travis County?
The number of fires has actually decreased because the public realizes and understands what the dangers are. Those fires that normally would get out—people burning trash and left it unattended for a few minutes—have gone away.

The majority of fires that are happening now are just because of the bad habits of people. We’ve developed habits over the years, such as dumping our cigarettes out of the window. That is now not only a crime, it’s just extremely dangerous.

[Another] bad habit is cooking in a barbecue pit and leaving the vent open. Coal falling out on the ground now can result in the loss of a house.

In general, when could we expect to see rain again?
Usually there is some rain in September. The predictions now are that that will not be the case for our area this year. The long-range forecast done by the U.S. Drought Monitor is predicting a warmer-than-normal and drier-than-normal fall and winter. So, just taking that into consideration, you’d think it may be next spring.

A half-inch of rain would be absorbed in an hour or two and the fuels would be dry again. You could have a half-inch of rain at noon and be fighting a grass fire at 3 p.m.

To get away from the condition we’re in now, I’ve heard our emergency management coordinator say we need several days of very slow rain.

You have said that the most common cause of fire is undetermined.
The state fire marshal’s office publishes an annual report that has a list of the causes of fire and the dollar damage. As for the list of causes, the largest will be those that are undetermined.

The guidelines that an arson investigator works under are [that they must both determine a cause and rule out all other possible causes].

If you have a fire near a burn pile and there’s hot metal and cigarette butts, you may know exactly where the fire started, but the cause would be undetermined.
In a city with as many worthy causes as Austin, choosing which nonprofits to support can be daunting. Prospective donors can use Austin Community Foundation to make philanthropy easier.

Since 1977, ACF has connected donors with causes by setting up scholarships and grants for nonprofits throughout Central Texas and the world. From education to cancer research, ACF has distributed nearly $100 million in assets and is making a permanent mark on the needs of the Austin community.

“Our mission is to foster philanthropy for the lasting good of the community,” said Jeff Garvey, president and CEO of ACF. “The organization is all about philanthropy, not only in facilitating people giving money, but directing them as to where they should have their funds invested. We are focused on trying to educate on the value and the obligation to give money.”

Garvey is the newest addition to ACF. He became president and CEO in June and officially started the new chapter of his philanthropic career July 5.

Garvey co-founded Austin Ventures, one of the largest venture capital firms in the United States. His true passion is philanthropy. “In 1996, I was still a general partner and just happened to meet this young man—Lance Armstrong—who was as bald as I am today, but for very different reason: He had just come off his final regimen of chemotherapy,” Garvey said.

“We were neighborhoods but had never met one another, and he had this notion of starting a cancer foundation but nothing beyond that.”

Garvey became founding chairman of The Lance Armstrong Foundation. The Lance Armstrong Foundation, now Livestrong, went on to become one of the largest nonprofits in the world and has raised more than $400 million to date toward cancer research.

Although still involved with Livestrong, Garvey wanted to expand the breadth of his philanthropy. ACF’s mission caught his attention.

“We are an incredible one-stop shop option for those who want to give money,” he said. “Some people know specifically what they want to give to, lots of people know generally, and some people don’t have any idea what they want to give to. We can help the whole spectrum.”

Potential donors can create an online account, similar to online banking, where they can monitor their money and get advice and feedback on nonprofits from ACF’s 12-member staff.

“How we give grants is a reflection of the people who have their money with us, the people who are the donors and the fund holders. That is what is going to help us create a legacy,” ACF Communications Director Monica Williams said. “We adapt to the needs of what our donors want. It varies year to year.”

With budget cuts creating education concerns throughout Texas, education grants and scholarships are a very important part of their work, Williams said.

“People are looking for ways to give and fund scholarships or however they feel they can make an impact,” she said.

Jeff Garvey, president and CEO of Austin Community Foundation, helps connect people to worthy causes.

The hungry in Central Texas today may surprise you. They are our friends and neighbors, recently laid-off adults, the elderly couple on the next block with a fixed income, all hiding in full view. And of the 48,000 clients we serve every week, more than 1 in 3 are children. Hunger is unacceptable, especially in our own backyard. We can end hunger, but we can’t do it alone.

Thank You to our honoree Rebecca Powers, founder of Impact Austin and to our sponsors for making this event a success. Your contributions make a difference to our students receiving scholarships.
Hackney
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Austin Water customer, Amy, saved water in the shower with a timer, low-flow showerhead and bucket to catch water for the plants.
Westcreek
78749

Overview

Build-out year: 1978–86
Builders: Bill Millburn
Square footage: 1,178–2,202
Home values: $142,000–$259,900
HOA dues (estimated): $30 annually, voluntary
Nearby attractions: Gold’s Gym, Lifetime Fitness, restaurants, grocery stores

Property taxes:
- Austin ISD 1.2270
- Travis County 0.4658
- City of Austin 0.4571
- Austin Community College 0.0951
- Central Health 0.0719
- Total (per $100 value) 2.3169

Schools:
- Patton Elementary School, 6001 Westcreek Drive
- Clint Small Middle School, 4801 Monterey Oaks Blvd.
- Austin High School, 1715 W. Cesar Chavez St.

Featured homes

6400 Rapture Cove
4 Bedroom / 2.5 Bath
Agent: Katie Anweiler
6103 Smith Oak
3 Bedroom / 2 Bath
Agent: Laura De Haro
5624 Porsche Lane
3 Bedroom / 2 Bath
Agent: Alicia Kelley
5414 Wolf Run
3 Bedroom / 2 Bath
Agent: Donna Beaver

Home sales (September 2010–August 2011)

- No. of homes for sale: 6
- No. of homes under contract: 2
- Avg. days on the market: 72
- No. of homes sold in the last year: 25
- Square footage Low/High: 1,178/2,202
- Selling price Low/High: $142,000/$259,900

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SSgt CHAD D. HILL, EA Recruiter 512-589-0682
TSgt NICHOLAS D. TAPIA, EA Recruiter 512-589-0385

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*Annual Percentage Rate. All rates are expressed “as low as”. Actual rate may vary depending on credit qualifications. Rates and terms are subject to change without notice. Federally insured by the NCUA.
### Property Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZIP code</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Bed/Bath</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Sq. ft</th>
<th>Agent</th>
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### Monthly home sales

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<td>Aug. 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug. 2010</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
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</table>

### ZIP code guide

- **78735**: Oak Hill / Southwest Parkway area
- **78736**: Oak Hill
- **78737**: Oak Hill
- **78738**: Circle C area
- **78739**: South of Ben White, Sunset Valley
- **78745**: Shady Hollow / Manchaca area
- **78748**: MoPac / William Cannon area
- **78749**: Southwest Austin

---

*Property listings includes townhomes, houses, and condos.*

---

*Market data includes computer listings, sales and pending sales.*

---

*Data provided by the Austin Board of Realtors.*

---

*New homes sales include lodging.*

---
STAGE 2 WATER RESTRICTIONS

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RESIDENTIAL EVEN ADDRESS
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• Residential car washing only on designated watering days/times. No charity car washes.
• No washing of sidewalks, driveways, parking areas or paved areas except to alleviate health/safety hazard.
• Limit golf fairway irrigation to designated days and times.
• No water to be served at restaurants unless requested.
• No outdoor fountains except to provide aeration for aquatic life.
• No automatic fill valves for pools/ponds.

Violating water restrictions is a class C misdemeanor with a $475 fine.

Visit WaterWiseAustin.org for more information.

STAGE 2 WATER RESTRICTIONS TOOK EFFECT SEPTEMBER 6

STAGE 2 WATER RESTRICTIONS

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