

City Council Update

Former Council Member Earl Broussard was recently appointed to fill the Council spot vacated by Davin Fillpot who resigned to accept a position as our new City Planner. Earl will serve until May 2012 when there will be an election to fill the remaining year of Davin's term.

In addition to Place 5, an election is scheduled for May 2012 for Mayor, City Council Place 2 and City Council Place 4. Anyone interested in running should contact City Secretary Janet Rogers at (512) 327-3628.

In the coming months, the City Council will decide whether or not to move its 2013 election date to November as Austin and other jurisdictions have recently done.



THE CITY OF WEST LAKE HILLS

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Fire Safety Brush Collection Project Sets a Record

West Lake Hills residents have removed a record amount of dead wood and brush from their properties as part of the City's most recent free brush collection project.

Over 800 tons of materials have been crushed, chipped and hauled away over the past six weeks by two contractors hired by the City. Removal of these highly flammable materials will increase public safety by reducing the amount of fuel for a wildfire event.

Instead of entering a landfill, the collected materials will be mulched and resold at local garden centers.

This is the fourth time that the City has offered the free brush collection project. Each time, the project cost has increased as more residents take advantage of the program. This most recent collection is expected to cost approximately \$250,000 once it is completed in early December.

The dead brush collection project is just one of several initiatives authorized by the City Council to reduce the risk of wildfire in and around West Lake Hills. Soon after the devastating Bastrop and Steiner Ranch fires, the City implemented a very restrictive outdoor burn ban and installed a dozen red warning signs along area roadways warning drivers

that discarding cigarette butts carries a maximum fine of \$2,000.

The City stepped up fire prevention inspections at building sites, notified property owners about the ongoing requirement to remove all dead brush and vegetation from their properties, and met with Travis County and Wild Basin Nature Preserve representatives to discuss broader measures to reduce risk on our northern frontier.

Out of those meetings emerged the idea of establishing "shaded fuel breaks" along the border between the City and the Nature Preserve where dead wood, brush and lower-level tree limbs are removed to slow or stop a ground fire. City staff are researching the costs and will report back to the City Council in the coming weeks.

In October, the City Council approved spending approximately \$30,000 to conduct tests on all of the fire hydrants located in the City to insure that there is sufficient water flow and pressure to fight a possible fire. Travis County Water

Control and Improvement District 10 oversaw the testing and reports that all operational hydrants exceed the minimum requirements in the International Fire Code. Operational deficiencies on a few isolated hydrants were identified and are being repaired.

Once the final costs of the dead brush collection project are known, the City Council will consider other initiatives to improve fire safety, including the possible installation



Many property owners utilized the free brush collection project to remove dangerous dead wood and brush from their properties. Minimizing fuel loads on densely vegetated tracts will help reduce the risk of wildfire throughout the city.

of fire access roads in select areas, an expedited variance process for property owners who want to remove vegetation that is prohibited by City Code, and even a remote video camera system mounted on a nearby antenna to automatically detect wildfires.

Bee Cave Road at Redbud Trail

Austin Energy has begun the difficult task of relocating the electrical service lines along the south side of Bee Cave Road at Redbud Trail as the first step in the long-awaited effort to widen Bee Cave Road and add a center turn lane at that dangerous intersection.

The new metal poles are being installed several yards outside of the new roadway on land generously donated by the owners of the Village at Westlake and St. John Neumann Catholic Church. City leaders have worked diligently over the past two years to secure the donation of the needed parcels.

The center turn lane at the entrance to the Village at Westlake will be extended to a point approximately 100 yards east of

Redbud Trail. The far-right east-bound lane will become a right-turn-only lane entering the Church property. A sidewalk will be built along the south side of the road. And the traffic signal at Redbud Trail will be upgraded to add a dedicated left-turn signal in both directions. These upgrades are expected to significantly improve safety and congestion along this section of Bee Cave Road.

Principal construction is expected to begin in March 2012, with an estimated project completion date of early 2013.

The City is continuing to work with property owners along the rest of Bee Cave Road in order to secure the necessary right-of-way to install a center turn lane in those areas.



Wildfire Safety Tips

- Several of the recent wildfires in Central Texas were started by arcing electrical lines. If you see tree limbs or other vegetation interfering with electrical lines, please report it to Austin Energy at (512) 494-9400.
- Remember that the use (and even possession) of fireworks is prohibited in West Lake Hills.
- Sign up for the City's mass notification system at www.westlakehills.org.

New Gate Requirements

The City Council passed a new ordinance on October 12 that requires all driveway gates in the city (both new and existing) to have a KNOX-type locking device to allow secure access by emergency responders.

Property owners have until April, 2012 to bring their gates



into compliance by installing a KNOX device purchased through Emergency Services District #9 (aka the Westlake Fire Department at (512) 539-9400). Similar to a lock box device used by realtors to secure a key when selling a home, a KNOX device should contain a key or keypad code that will allow the fire department to open your gate and access your property in the event of an emergency.

Wastewater System Update

The long struggle to purchase our wastewater collection system from the LCRA continues.

City leaders were alarmed in November 2010 when the LCRA Board of Directors announced its intention to sell its portfolio of 30 water and wastewater systems located throughout Central Texas.

Over the past year, the City has pursued various strategies to ensure that our system would not be sold to an Enron-like, investor-owned private utility system at an inflated price. It is believed that such a sale would result in service rates that would be much higher than if the City were to own and operate the system.

To accomplish that goal, the City commissioned a third-party appraisal of our system that showed that it was worth far less than what the LCRA was demanding on the open market. We then let it be known that we intended to condemn the system from any purchaser who paid more than the value determined by the appraisal.

The good news is that this strategy worked as intended: no bidder was willing to pay the LCRA's inflated asking price for our system and risk condemnation by the City. The LCRA Board of Directors then decided to take our system off the market, choosing to keep it in their portfolio (along with a few others including Rollingwood's wastewater system). Although this leaves us stuck in our

unhappy marriage with the LCRA, it is definitely preferable to being bought by an investor-owned water utility that would raise rates to recover its inflated investment.

Meanwhile, we continue to pursue options for acquiring our system at a fair and reasonable price. The City is a member of the Coalition of Central Texas Utilities Development Corporation that was formed with several other communities affected by the LCRA's divestiture. That Coalition is making progress with its plans to acquire one or more of the remaining systems up for sale. West Lake Hills may benefit from those negotiations as well.

Meanwhile, the Wastewater Commission is studying the options for extending the wastewater system to the Hull Circle area of town where many homes have septic systems that are approaching the end of their usable lifespans. Since many of the lots in that area may be too small to accommodate new septic systems that conform to state law, connection to the City's wastewater system may be the only cost-effective option available to those homeowners.

The City is negotiating with the LCRA regarding the details of this "Phase 3" project in the Hull Circle area to make sure that any additional investment in our system doesn't just line the LCRA's pockets at the City's expense.



Recycling More Popular Than Ever

The City recently received some interesting data from Texas Disposal Systems (TDS) about our free single-stream recycling program.

The City Council voted to switch from bi-weekly to weekly recycling collection last year to help encourage greater participation in the recycling program.

According to TDS, 99% of residents are participating in the program, helping to divert tons of recyclable materials from the waste stream. TDS reports that although recycling is collected every week, on average West Lake Hills residents only put their collection cart out by the curb every other week.

TDS also tells us that the second garbage collection day of the week is underutilized: 70 percent of the garbage is collected on the first collection day of the week and 30 percent is collected on the second day.

The City Council currently has no plans to change the frequency of garbage or recycling service.

Other Free Brush Collection Options

In addition to twice per week garbage service and weekly single stream recycling, the City's free solid waste collection service includes two ways to dispose of yard waste including grass clippings and leaves.

Monthly yard waste pickup. To take advantage of this service, keep in mind the following: Tree limbs must be bundled, and the bundles must be no longer than 4 feet long, weigh no more than 35 pounds, and placed curbside. Leaves and grass clippings must be in paper, lawn bags. No more than 35 paper, lawn bags and 3 cubic yards of bundled limbs will be picked up each month at any one residence. Call Texas Disposal

Systems (TDS) at (512) 421-1340 to get on the schedule for this month or to get more information.

Haul it yourself. You can take your own yard waste to the TDS landfill located at 3016 FM 1327 in Creedmoor south of Austin. Residents can dispose of up to 5 cubic yards (approximately one standard pick-up load) of yard waste once each month. To use this service, pick up a coupon at City Hall. When you get to the landfill, you will be required to give your coupon to the attendant and show your driver's license.

Take advantage of these great services and help us reduce the risk of wildfire in West Lake Hills!