



### Variance Application Process Review

The West Lake Hills City Council and Zoning and Planning Commission held a special meeting earlier this fall to discuss ways to improve the variance application process for both the City and the applicants. Several ideas were discussed including revisions to the existing variance paperwork to make it more thorough and complete.

The City Council has appointed a special committee – made up of two City Council members and two Zoning and Planning Commission members – to review the variance application process and make recommendations for improvements.

The special committee will focus only on the forms and the overall process – and not on the Code of Ordinances itself or how ZAPCO and the City Council evaluate variance requests.

If you have a suggestion, we'd love to hear it. Email your idea to Robert Wood: [cityadmin@westlakehills.org](mailto:cityadmin@westlakehills.org).

### Wastewater System

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need to get an idea of our financing costs and debt payment schedule. If those payments (the total principal and interest paid over the life of the financing) and the operating costs of owning the system are lower than what we're currently obligated to pay the LCRA, then we will know it's a good deal for the ratepayers and the City.

If we can secure an interest rate close to or lower than what is currently available on the open market, financing the purchase would be less costly for the City than the LCRA financing we have in place today. A bank loan (in the form of certificates of obligation) would probably be less complicated and less costly than going to the bond market, but it all depends on the interest rate we can get at the time we close.

Want to voice your opinion on this critical decision? Email the Mayor and City Council (email addresses to the right of this column) or come to a City Council meeting on January 5 or January 12 (both meetings will start at 7pm at City Hall: 911 Westlake Drive).



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## Important Decisions Ahead for City's Wastewater System

It's official: the LCRA Board of Directors has announced their intention to sell all of their retail water and wastewater systems including the West Lake Hills municipal wastewater collection system. As you probably know, the City of West Lake Hills has been in negotiations for more than a year to purchase our system from the LCRA but we've yet to agree on a purchase price. The LCRA Board has given us until mid-January to reach agreement on a price, after which they will market our system in a bundle of 32 LCRA-owned systems to the highest bidder – a twelve to twenty-four month process, at least. That process could result in our wastewater system being purchased by a private entity with a for-profit motive – not at all what the City envisioned ten years ago when we first signed our contract with the LCRA.

The City recently submitted an offer that the City Council believes is reasonable and fair to both parties. Unfortunately, the LCRA has rejected the City's latest offer because it did not include approximately \$550,000 in future "development fees" which the LCRA believes it is due under the current contract. The City's position is that this additional fee

is inappropriate because it actually represents unearned, future profits that the LCRA is not entitled to receive once it no longer owns or operates our system and is no longer providing any services to City wastewater customers.

In light of these developments and our interest in protecting the City's wastewater system and its customers, the City Council held a special meeting on December 29 and will meet again on January 5 and January 12 to decide how to proceed.

On the one hand, the City could choose to "wait-and-see" what happens with the LCRA's efforts to sell our system as a bundle along with the 32 other systems.

One possible outcome is that the LCRA may eventually agree to sell us our system at a lower price than they are currently demanding.

Our contract with the LCRA has a "first right of refusal" clause, which allows us to purchase our system by matching any offer that is acceptable to the LCRA. So if a potential buyer made a low-ball bid on all 32 LCRA systems and the LCRA Board agreed to accept that offer, then we could ask

what portion of the offer corresponds to our municipal system, and we could buy it from the LCRA at that price – assuming, of course, that it's lower than what the LCRA is currently demanding.

The "assignment" clause of our contract, states that the LCRA may not assign our contract to any other entity without our permission. So, if the LCRA agrees to accept a third-party purchase offer that is higher than what the City is willing to pay, we could block the buyer from taking over our contract.

The "wait-and-see" approach is both complicated and risky with the only certain winners being the lawyers and other consultants involved.

On the other hand, the City Council could decide to pay the full purchase price that the LCRA is demanding. If the City Council chooses this path, we will need to move quickly on the last piece of due-diligence necessary to determine whether or not the purchase and ownership of our wastewater system will benefit our ratepayers and the City as a whole. The final purchase price is the last variable piece of due-diligence we



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## Living with the Wildlife Among Us

By City Council Member Stan Graham

Over the past few months, residents have reported seeing an increase in the number of coyotes within the city limits. These animals have always been part of our rural environment, but there is considerable evidence that their population has recently increased both in the City and throughout the country. Urbanization is pushing animals and humans closer together at a rapid rate and our situation is certainly not unique. It is both natural and inevitable that the environment we enjoy living in for it's natural beauty will also attract these wild creatures seeking a suitable setting for their survival.

Since it is a certainty that some of these animals will always be among us, our dilemma is to find the correct balance between lessening any threat they might pose to our citizens and allowing them to perform their natural function of controlling unwanted pests such as rodents. While the city will continue to explore the various means of achieving that balance, it's important to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the overall problem.

Coyotes are clever, smart, and highly adaptable animals. They live in a territory which can range from 10-40 square miles, a range far greater than the confines of West Lake Hills. Generally they are extremely shy and

fearful of any human presence. Their diet, while classified as carnivorous, is really omnivorous. Insects, birds, eggs, fruit, fish, and various rodents make up the mainstay of their food source

One of our major problems with these animals in West Lake Hills is that they are an "opportunistic" and cunning predator. They will stalk their prey for 20 to 30 minutes using their extremely well developed sense of smell.



Photo courtesy Texas Parks and Wildlife Department © 2006

While they do serve our community in keeping down the rapid growth of rodents and other unwanted pests, they do pose a threat

to many of our pets and, although highly unlikely, to our citizens as well.

Given the complexity of this problem, here are some of the issues we face in attempting to control this situation. First and foremost, it's important to realize and accept the fact that whatever we do will only be temporary. Trapping and removing coyotes has been suggested, but according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "trapping and similar removal control actions cannot eliminate urban coyote problems." It is difficult, if not impossible, to capture all the coyotes living in a specific area and remove them. Generally, when they are removed, replacements quickly move in from surrounding areas.

In addition to trapping, killing these animals is also not considered

totally effective because the remaining animals will react by having larger litters or by allowing outside coyotes to enter their area without resistance.

Most respected sources emphasize the importance of education in dealing with a coyote population. The information falls into two categories: what you should do to discourage coyotes from approaching your home or person and what you should do when confronted by a coyote at close range.

Most resources agree on the following actions to discourage coyotes from approaching you or your home:

- Never attempt to feed a coyote
- Keep compost piles covered
- Keep small pets inside, especially at night
- Walk with pets on a short leash
- Do not feed other wildlife (especially feral cats) on the ground
- Secure all garbage left outdoors
- Never leave pet food outdoors, especially at night
- Never leave small children unattended outdoor

When confronted by a coyote:

- Use lights, noise making devices and other scaring devices when a coyote is seen near or about your home
- Avoid eye contact
- Do not turn your back and run
- Attempt to leave the area calmly
- If followed, make loud noises and make yourself big (flapping your coat or shirt, waving your arms, etc.)
- As a last resort, throw rocks and sticks in the direction of the animal while not actually trying to hit it.

## Tryouts to Begin Soon for the West Lake Hills Bobsled Team?

Longtime area resident, Dr. Ted Edwards, is one of those people you just love to meet. He's a fascinating man with a special bond to our community.

Dr. Edwards came to Austin in 1964 as the area's first gastroenterologist. As his practice expanded along with his knowledge of medicine, he realized that practicing medicine required a more holistic, comprehensive approach. He began to study the interactions between the mind, the body, the spirit and good health.

He bought land along Bee Cave Road in 1970 and founded The Hills Fitness Center in 1980 as one of the area's first wellness centers. The Center offered stress management, nutrition counselling, and fitness training – services that continued after he sold the business in 1987 and are still offered today at this popular West Lake Hills business.

In 1980, the U.S. Olympic cycling team trained in Austin and they approached Dr. Edwards about using the facility for their athletes, which he allowed them to do for free. A year later, they asked him to serve as a team

physician, a role he filled until 1992. During that time, Dr. Edwards worked 2-week rotations in Lake Placid, NY, where he met the U.S. Olympic bobsled, luge and ice skating teams. In 1986, one of the bobsled team members lived in Austin and needed a place to practice "push offs" – the complicated technique of launching the bobsled at the start of a race. Dr. Edwards had an idea.

His college-age son secured donations from various patrons including Roger Beasley and Adams Extract Company. They picked out a good spot on a hillside overlooking Eanes Creek and they drew up some plans. And the West Lake Hills Bobsled Track was born!

Contractors built an earthen slope with flat areas at the top and bottom of the hill. They used a standard bobsled

with steel wheels attached to the bottom that would ride on two narrow-gauge rails similar to the train track at Zilker Park. The athletes would perform the "push off" at the top of the hill, jump into the bobsled, ride a dozen yards or so down one side of the slope and then up the opposite side, slowing to a stop before the track ran out.

At least that was the idea. It didn't quite work out that way. After just one test run, it quickly became apparent that the opposite side of the slope was not quite steep enough to stop the rocketing bobsled before it launched into the waters of Eanes Creek. Members of the U.S. Olympic bobsled team practiced on the track a few harrowing times, but it never fulfilled its destiny as an Olympic training facility.

Today, twenty-four years later, you can still see the two rails on the earthen slope next to Eanes Creek behind The Hills Fitness Center. It's a testimony to the pursuit of athletic excellence – and to one man's commitment to

his community and his country.

Dr. Edwards still practices wholistic and integrative medicine out of The Hills Medical Group office in the Schoolyard office building next to Eanes Elementary. For more information, visit his website at [www.poweraging.com](http://www.poweraging.com).



ABOVE: A view from the top of the slope looking down toward Eanes Creek.



LEFT: The end of the ride, just a few feet from the creek.