

Old Austin Neighborhood Association (OANA)
7 March 2017

The Board of Directors (BoD) of OANA held their scheduled monthly meeting on 7 March 2017 at the Common Room of the Regency Apartments. BoD members in attendance were Ted Siff, Michael Portman, Charles Peveto, Blake Tollett, Ray Canfield and Austin Stowell. Those asking to be excused were Perry Lorenz, Perry Horton, Diana Zuniga and Bill Schnell. Advisory council members in attendance were Catherine Van Hersch, Kathy Marcus and Roger Cauvin.

On motion from Charles with Michael seconding, the minutes from February were conditionally approved due to an initial lack of quorum. When the quorum was achieved, the minutes as written were unanimously approved and Bill will post them.

We began by revisiting the application for demolition filed by the current owners of the property at 405 W. 14th Street (contingently referenced as the Tobin House). The request was brought before the Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) at their last meeting on 27 February, and the commission voted 10-0 to initiate historic zoning on the property over the owners' objection. The matter returns to the HLC on 27 March for an official recommendation. Although a decision to release the demolition permit is possible, it is anticipated that the HLC will recommend to the Planning Commission (PC) and subsequently to City Council that the property be zoned historic. At this time the official OANA position is to encourage the current owners to withdraw their request for demolition at which time OANA would support a rezoning of the property to DMU and would "work with the property owner to find a solution that provides a competitive market value while preserving the historic character of the property". Due to the property owners' objection to their zoning district being changed to historic there is in effect a valid petition on file against the rezoning, and a valid petition when the matter comes before the City Council will necessitate a super majority vote by the Council for historic zoning to be enacted. The application of historic zoning on a property over an owner's objection is extremely difficult to accomplish, but on the other hand, once a property is taken down it is gone forever. In our discussions of this matter the Board has been very aware of the sometimes conflict between property rights and historic preservation. It was noted that there is a website initiated by those in favor of historic zoning at www.tobinhouse.org and that there is a Change.org petition online asking that the property be zoned historic. We will revisit the matter at our April meeting.

Under **Items for Discussion and Action**, we first discussed the proposed W. 12th Street Esplanade, the reforesting of the medians along W. 12th Street. The monies spun off from the Cecilia condominiums on Nueces and W. 9th Streets are available and the City is committed to using the monies to purchase and plant the trees, but so far there hasn't been further action. An encouraging note is that while discussing the recent conversion of The Rise project into time-shares by the Marriott Group with the new project manager, Ted received a verbal commitment by the Marriott folks of a donation to the esplanade project. Once the trees are in place it will be OANA's responsibility to see to their maintenance and watering, so it may be possible for the purple pipe system to be incorporated into the project. Michael will continue investigating and report back to us in April.

We then began discussing the idea of an “Original Austin Neighborhood Tour”, a proposed event to be held in the fall when the weather begins cooling down. We have a variety of assets that would lend themselves to a public tour beyond historic structures; perhaps this is an opportunity for residential properties and event centers to market themselves. Potentially we could partner with established tours. There were good ideas discussed but what is necessary is for someone to step forward and lead the project. Catherine will discuss this leadership deficiency with someone she knows at the Nokonah who might be willing to take this on.

A discussion of the currently ongoing revision of the City’s Land Development Code (LDC) was next with emphasis on how our neighborhood will be affected. The City has brought forward the initial narrative but how and where the new nomenclature and development guidelines are going to be applied is still somewhat a mystery. A visioning of how the City develops going forward along with a simplification of the process of how this vision is enacted were some of the broad definitions of the project, but as in many things, the devil is in the details. Hopefully for our neighborhood, the Downtown Austin Plan/Northwest District, a City Council approved and codified neighborhood plan, will emerge relatively intact. How CodeNEXT will affect and be implemented in the rest of the City is another matter. The OANA BoD will return to the discussion as needed.

Under **Committee Reports and Action Items**, Charles related that It’s My Park Day (IMPD) at Wooldridge Square on Saturday 4 March was somewhat rained out, but there were volunteers and some of the scheduled mulching got done. PARD will come by when the weather clears and finish up the job. In coordination with the University of Texas Architecture School, a graduate student is going to do a Historic American Building Survey (HABS) report of Wooldridge Square. Ted Eubank’s report on the Austin Story in relation to the historic public squares continues under Downtown Austin Association funding.

Ted reported that the engineering study the Shoal Creek Conservancy (SCC) funded to study possible flood mitigation strategies for the lower section of the creek will have a public unveiling on Thursday next (the 9th) at the Cirrus Logic building. The initial question of what is the goal of the study is important in not only defining the project but also steering the study. For example, the initial Waller Creek study’s goal was how to remove 24 acres of prime real estate in downtown Austin along Waller Creek from the 100-year flood plain. With that goal in mind, the Waller Creek project has been evolving over 20 years and has resulted in an underground tunnel diverting the creek’s flood waters at a cost of \$160 million. To completely control flooding along the entirety of Shoal Creek would cost a tremendous amount of money and political good will and is really not feasible. The Conservancy thinks the appropriate modifier of a Shoal Creek flood mitigation project is whether the benefit justifies the cost. [NOTE: You can view the March 9th presentation on the City’s website at www.austintexas.gov/shoalcreekfloods and sign up for updates by sending an email to Stephanie.Lott@austintexas.gov.]

No one was aware of any further progress on the Duncan Park Master Plan. Charles will seek an update of the purple pipe project that is using the park for a staging site.

The former Aziz site's transformation into a surface parking lot (710 W. 7th Street; SP-2016-0435D) appears to have stalled. It will be communicated to Cirrus Logic that OANA is willing to help expedite the permit process if that is the holdup.

There is no news on the Gilfillan House (603 W. 8th Street) renovation proposal.

Having passed a pleasant hour and a half, we voted to adjourn. Again due to scheduling conflicts, our next BoD meeting will be on Tuesday 4 April at the Shoal Creek Saloon.

Blake Tollett, Secretary
OANA