



# Eastside Environmental News

20<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative

Spring/Summer 2013



Flat Top Burgers opens at former gas station

## From Old School Gas Station to Old School Burgers

The City of Austin's Brownfields Program helped turn an old gas station into a new and popular eatery in East Austin. At the intersection of Manor Road and Dean Keeton Street stands Flat Top Burger Shop. This small slice of hamburger heaven is a welcome addition to other fine eateries in this area.

The previous owner was having a difficult time marketing this property because of its past environmental history. Former gas stations - with side bays where mechanics changed oil and performed general auto repairs - are often perceived as undesirable, due to potential contamination. Old gas stations can have leaking underground fuel storage tanks that are expensive to fix or clean up. Some former gas stations harbor residual pollutants, such as antifreeze, solvents, petroleum hydrocarbons and heavy metals. Not knowing if a property has contamination issues makes properties of this type challenging to market or sell.

The owner of this property voluntarily enrolled in the City's Brownfields Program. With help from the program, the owner received a grant-funded environmental site assessment and technical assistance to remediate the site. Participation in the Brownfields program helped the owner obtain a clean bill of health for the property from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), which led to better marketing for a quick sale of the property. The program benefited both the former property owner and the neighborhood by helping return a once-idle, urban property to productive use.

The Brownfields Program brings together stakeholders and resources to assess properties with potential environmental contamination and to help clean the land for reuse, when needed. For more information, visit:

<http://austintexas.gov/department/brownfields>



Oscar Garza

### Field Notes... 20 Years of Environmental Service

*The East Austin Environmental Initiative, EAEI, is thrilled to celebrate our 20th Anniversary of service to the community!*

*The Initiative started in 1993 at the request of East Austin residents who wanted to become involved in serious environmental issues that affected their neighborhoods. Over the past two decades, the community has accumulated a long list of impressive achievements, including the closure and remediation of the "Tank Farms," the closure of the Holly Power Plant, and the relocation of the recycling center at Airport and Bolm Road. The partnerships formed between the City of Austin and groups such as People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources, Rhizome Collective, Austin Youth Riverwatch, University of Texas, Austin Independent School District schools, and many others has been a rewarding experience.*

*The bottom line is that the success of the EAEI is due to the dedication of community members to their neighborhoods and the City's commitment to the citizens of East Austin.*

*As part of our commemoration, we've also updated our look! We are very pleased to unveil our new logo (see the newsletter banner) and to launch this new and improved, full-color layout for the newsletter to make our report more visually-appealing and enjoyable to read.*

*I look forward to our continued service and partnership. As always, please feel free to contact me:*

Oscar Garza  
512-974-1893  
[Oscar.Garza@austintexas.gov](mailto:Oscar.Garza@austintexas.gov)

**24 Hour Pollution Hotline 512-974-2550**  
**Linea de la contaminación, atiende 24 horas al día**

## City Establishes "Grow Zones"

Last year, the City's Watershed Protection and Parks and Recreation Departments joined forces to improve the health of creeks in several City parks. Water quality in creeks is vastly improved by restoring riparian zones (the land adjacent to the creeks) to a more natural state. New and improved management practices include not mowing the plants and grasses next to creeks, so the City has named these areas Grow Zones.

The establishment of Grow Zones will provide many benefits, such as reducing risks of flooding and stream bank erosion, improving the area's soil and water quality, and increasing wildlife habitat. The vegetated Grow Zones protect the creek from pollution by filtering the water that flows to creeks during a rainstorm. A mature riparian zone can reduce the intensity and spread of wildfires by increasing local shade, soil moisture and humidity. Healthy creekside vegetation also provides a more authentic Texas landscape for the enjoyment of park users and nature lovers.

How do we create Grow Zones? We stop the regular mowing along the creek, which allows a more biologically-diverse plant community to grow in place of the existing, degraded turf. At first, these zones might look a bit unsightly, but please be patient! Over time, native grasses and, eventually, trees will become established and transform the area into a more natural and beautiful landscape.

City staff will actively monitor each site to document the transition and ensure that the restoration goals are being reached. They will meet with neighborhood associations, conduct educational creek walks for citizens, and post signs to explain the process.

The Grow Zone initiative is an important step in the management of healthy creeks and parks. The community can support Grow Zone projects by adopting a creek, participating in restoration activities, and educating others about the benefits of these areas. For more information, contact the Watershed Protection Department at 512-974-2550, or visit [www.austintexas.gov/watershed/creekside](http://www.austintexas.gov/watershed/creekside).



The Fort Branch project covers one mile of the creek, from Fort Branch Boulevard to the Eleanor Street cul-de-sac. This project will stabilize the natural stream bank, using limestone boulders and native plants. The project also includes the construction of a new bridge at Fort Branch Boulevard, storm drain improvements, and the City's acquisition of some flood-prone properties next to the creek.

These projects will make a welcome difference in terms of flooding, erosion and water quality in East Austin! For more information visit: <http://austintexas.gov/fortbranchrehab> or <http://austintexas.gov/boggycreekrestoration>.

## Thank You, East Austin!

The East Austin Environmental Initiative recently mailed a survey to residents, property owners, and businesses to determine what environmental concerns exist in the East Austin community. We greatly appreciate the wonderful response!

We are compiling the information, which will help us investigate immediate environmental threats and focus our community outreach efforts.

You can ALWAYS (24 hours per day, 7 days per week) let us know about pollution problems or environmental concerns through our Environmental Hotline at 512-974-2550.

**Family clean creek camp**

**Cost = FREE after \$40**  
reimbursable deposit

Parents, join your 9-13 year olds for a week of fun exploring Austin's creeks and aquifer. Groups with adult leaders are also invited.

**9AM to Noon**  
all sessions

June 10-13 (4 day) Watershed Camp  
July 8-11 (4 day) Watershed & Aquifer Camp  
July 16-18 (3 day) Watershed & Aquifer Camp

[www.austintexas.gov/departament/clean-creek-camp](http://www.austintexas.gov/departament/clean-creek-camp)  
or call 512-974-6571



Wastewater line at Boggy Creek to be removed

## East Austin Creeks Get Makeover

Two East Austin creeks are getting much-needed attention from the City's Watershed Protection Department. Boggy Creek and Fort Branch Creek are having some work done to address incidents of severe erosion and to improve water quality.

In the past, creek flow was controlled by directing water through concrete channels; however, City projects now use more natural channel designs, including local, limestone boulders and native plants, to help maintain the creeks' beneficial functions.

In the Boggy Creek project, staff will stabilize the creek banks in Rosewood Park, 1114 Nile Street, and remove exposed wastewater lines, while preserving the natural volcanic rock in the creek. To protect and improve the natural creek habitat, work crews will retain as many native trees as possible, introduce more native plants into the area, and construct two "swales" (channels or other low-lying landscape features) to capture and treat the surge of water flowing after storms before it runs into the creek. An additional benefit for park users will be improvements made to the pedestrian bridge.

## Austin Energy's Refrigerator/Freezer Recycling Program



Your old, inefficient refrigerator or freezer is costing you extra money and should be put permanently in the deep freeze!

Older refrigerators and freezers use two to three times more energy than a newer, Energy Star® model. An older unit in the garage during the summer has a significant impact on your electric bill! By recycling your old refrigerator/freezer, you can receive \$50 per appliance (for up to two appliances) from Austin Energy, plus save \$100 - \$200 a year on your electric bill!

The Austin Energy Refrigerator/Freezer Recycling Program provides FREE pick-up of older, working refrigerators and freezers for Austin Energy customers. Austin Energy's contractor recycles 98% of the materials in the appliances and safely disposes the ozone-depleting refrigerants.

To participate:

- You must be an Austin Energy electric utility customer.
- Your refrigerator or freezer must be an older unit, in working condition (cooling), and between 14-27 cubic feet in size.

Austin Energy residential customers will receive \$50 per appliance (paid by check), for up to two refrigerators, freezers, or a combination of the two appliances, within four to six weeks. To schedule the pick-up of your refrigerator or freezer, call (toll-free) 1-800-452-8685, or visit [www.austinenergy.com](http://www.austinenergy.com).

When you buy a new refrigerator or freezer, look for the ENERGY STAR® label for the greatest energy savings.

# EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS



## Where to Call for Pollution Information & Assistance

### CITY OF AUSTIN NUMBERS

General non-emergency  
311

Health & Human Services Department  
512-972-5600

Austin Clean Water Partners Program  
512-974-2550

East Austin Environmental Initiative  
512-974-1893

Pollution Hotline (24 Hr.)  
512-974-2550

Household Hazardous Waste program  
512-974-4343

Public Information Office  
512-974-2220

Solid Waste Services Customer Service  
512-494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints  
512-974-3355

Austin Water Utility  
(Sewage complaints 24 Hr.)  
512-972-1000

Zoning and Building Use Complaints  
512-974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office  
512-974-1954

### OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality  
512-339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority  
512-473-3307

### CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 512-974-2250

Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole 512-974-2266

### COUNCIL MEMBERS

Chris Riley 512-974-2260

Laura Morrison 512-974-2258

Kathie Tovo 512-974-2255

Bill Spellman 512-974-2256

Mike Martinez 512-974-2264



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## Viva Streets — May 19 Run, Play, Walk & Roll

Two miles of Sixth Street will be closed to cars and open to fun! Ride, walk, dance, hula hoop, or pogo stick jump your way down the street with breaks to try a free yoga class, healthy snacks and more!

### Where:

Sixth Street between Brazos St. & Robert Martinez Jr. St.

### When:

Sunday, May 19, from Noon-5pm

[www.VivaStreetsAustin.org](http://www.VivaStreetsAustin.org)

## Care For Our Creeks!

### Volunteer to Mark Storm Drains.

512-974-2550



## Community Corner

The Watershed Protection Department's Pollution Prevention staff asked East Austin residents to identify their top environmental concerns. Here are a few:



- trash and debris dumped on the City's rights of way
- more encouragement needed from the City for sustainable business practices

**Justin Dilbert-** Austin Fuel Injection & Performance, GM



- grocery carts dumped near the metal recycling facility along 5th Street

**Chip McElroy-** Live Oak Brewing Company- Owner



- Trash is being dumped all around empty lots in the Chicon and 7th Street area.

**Cole Wilson-** Resident Musician

Based on citizens' reported concerns, the Pollution Prevention team targets areas for increased educational outreach; investigates individual properties to determine if enforcement actions are needed; and coordinates, as needed, with other City departments and programs. At any time (24 hours/7 days), citizens can report suspected environmental contamination by calling 512-974-2550 or report illegal dump sites by calling 3-1-1. For more information on the Pollution Prevention program, visit [www.austintexas.gov/pollutionprevention](http://www.austintexas.gov/pollutionprevention).

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[www.austintexas.gov/watershed](http://www.austintexas.gov/watershed)