



Eastside Environmental News

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative

Spring/Summer 2015

thinkEAST: “Tank Farm” Revival

Plans to renovate the once infamous “Tank Farm” property are underway, which will transform a formerly contaminated and reviled property into a highly anticipated mixed-use development. Six of the largest oil companies operated petroleum storage and distribution facilities on this property (between Airport Boulevard, Bolm Road, and Shady Lane) for decades until the early 1990s. Contamination migrated into the surrounding neighborhoods, degrading natural areas, making residents sick, and stagnating economic growth in the area. In the early 1990s, six neighborhood residents formed a grassroots environmental organization, PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources), to lead the fight for environmental justice and remove the Tank Farm from east Austin. This pressure from the community led governmental officials to investigate the property. The State ordered an assessment and clean-up, and fuel storage ended in 1993. In 2012, developers Richard deVarga

and Robert Summers purchased and re-zoned the 24-acre property and formed thinkEAST, a model for sensitive development. The developers solicited input from community leaders and residents, earning their trust and support. Last year, thinkEAST joined forces with Austin nonprofit arts organization Fusebox to design an 18-month planning process for the community that prioritizes the needs of the immediate neighborhood, the arts, and creative industries. The inclusive and participatory planning process was awarded a \$400,000 grant from the ArtPlace America consortium of federal agencies, private foundations, and financial institutions.

At the midpoint of that process, and as part of the 2015 Fusebox Festival held in April, Fusebox invited the entire community to participate directly in the planning and visioning of the former Tank Farm. Community members contributed ideas for the site’s renovation during four days of performances, installations, talks, workshops, and planning activities.

continued on page 2



Oscar Garza

Field Notes...

It's amazing to see the major shifts that continue to occur in east Austin, both physical and philosophical. In this newsletter, we feature inspiring evidence of both.

One change to the physical landscape is the renovation of the former “Tank Farm” property. Once populated with petroleum storage tanks, this site incited frequent protests from nearby residents due to the emission of sickening fumes. Currently, thinkEAST is planning to redevelop this property into a multi-use, creative hub, with a design inspired by input from neighborhood groups and citizens.

As for philosophical transformation, we are witnessing an enthusiastic and ever-widening embrace of sustainable environmental practices. One shining example of new leadership in this direction comes from a student-led organization at Huston-Tillotson University, “Green is the New Black.” This recently formed group of young leaders is already attracting national attention.

I hope you'll enjoy reading about some of the exciting changes in East Austin. As always, please feel free to contact me with your feedback and ideas:

Oscar Garza
512-974-1893
Oscar.Garza@austintexas.gov

If you would like to receive this information electronically twice each year, please visit www.austintexas.gov/PollutionPrevention – in the Public Awareness Programs section (middle of page), click the “Subscribe to the biannual newsletter” tab.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL SITE



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

(left) thinkEAST plans to offer lower-cost apartments and affordable spaces for creative industries

EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

continued from page 1

The proposed development includes affordable living units and flexible work studios for a range of creative industries. The property is enhanced by its park-like location, near the City's new East 7th Gateway Corridor and adjacent to the Boggy Creek Priority Woodlands, Govalle Park, the Southern Walnut Creek Hike and Bike Trail, and the planned Green Line metro rail.

For more information, visit www.thinkeastaustin.com.

Bright Green Future Grants

Schools can be an amazing instigator of creative action among students; however, finding the funds to implement project ideas can be challenging. The City of Austin has created a Bright Green Future Grants program to help fill this void and support innovative projects that help students in grades K-12 develop a lifelong passion for environmental protection.

Since the program's inception in 2012, Austin-area students, teachers and parents have implemented a variety of projects on school campuses to support a "bright green future," including composting systems, earth-friendly stormwater infrastructure, rainwater harvesting systems, organic gardens, bike academies, outdoor classrooms, and wildlife habitats.

"A green mindset, coupled with problem-solving skills, is critical for our youth," says the City's Chief Sustainability Officer, Lucia Athens. "The creative thinking and evident passion and enthusiasm behind these projects give me great hope for our community's future."

Projects funded by the Bright Green Future Grants have already achieved impressive results, including:

- saving more than 65,000 gallons of water
- traveling 17,000 miles by bikes in place of cars
- decreasing waste more than 25% on four campuses through composting and recycling
- producing more than 2,500 pounds of vegetables
- growing 19 native species of plants

This competitive program provides funding for sustainability projects through sponsorships from the City's Office of Sustainability, Austin Resource Recovery, Watershed Protection, and the Public Works Department. Applications are accepted each year from September 1 through October 31.

For more information, visit www.austintexas.gov/bright-greenfuture, or contact the grants program coordinator, Mary Priddy, at mary.priddy@austintexas.gov or (512) 974-2539.



Eastside Memorial High School students show off their new garden.

Green is the New Black

For environmental protection to gain momentum in all parts of Austin, sustainability messaging must appeal to a diverse constituency, including communities of color. Green is the New Black (GITNB) is one of the leaders in a movement to infuse outreach and activism with an often-neglected perspective on race, culture, and community. GITNB, a student-led organization based at Huston-Tillotson University in east Austin, targets an African-American and Hispanic audience to widen the appeal of environmental conservation and foster “new shades of green” at the university and in the community.

In just its first year, GITNB has achieved notable success. Members competed against some of the most prestigious Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the country to win the \$75,000 top prize in the Ford HBCU Community Challenge in December. They won the honor of “Best Booth” at the 2014 Austin Earth Day Festival. At the 2014 SXSW festival, they led a panel discussing sustainability education, connections between student-led engagement and activism. They are now working with the City of Austin’s Transportation Division to expand student transportation options.

The organization has a strong presence both on-campus and beyond, working with community groups to open up a broader dialogue about sustainability, affordability, and environmental justice. Members also have reached out to a younger audience, working with students at nearby Blackshear Elementary School to build vegetable gardens on campus.

In recognizing that communities of color are too often left out of the “green” conversation, GITNB is not only making Austin more environmentally-friendly, but making our community more everybody-friendly.

For more information, visit <http://greenisthenewblack.org>.



Green is the New Black receives the “Best Booth” award at Austin’s 2014 Earth Day Festival.

austin materials marketplace

Businesses and entrepreneurs in Austin and Travis County have a new resource to help find uses for unwanted materials. The Austin Materials Marketplace is a new public-private partnership that aims to reduce waste going to landfills by connecting businesses that have unwanted materials with businesses that can use those materials. In August 2014, the US Business Council for Sustainable Development (US BCSD), together with Ecology Action of Texas and Austin Resource Recovery, launched this innovative program, in which one company’s waste becomes another company’s raw material.

As of mid-April, 64 businesses and organizations have signed up to participate, and the number is growing steadily. The marketplace has helped find new homes for items ranging from unneeded office furniture and obsolete electronics to plastic chart holders.

“We are excited to introduce this resource to the Austin business community so that today’s waste products can become tomorrow’s new revenue source,” said Bob Gedert, director of Austin Resource Recovery. “The launch of the Austin Materials Marketplace is an important step toward achieving Austin’s Zero Waste goal.”

Since 1995, US BCSD has successfully implemented similar business-to-business material reuse projects in many other U.S. cities, as well as other countries. To implement the project, the business council teamed up with Austin-based Ecology Action of Texas, a nonprofit organization with deep roots in Austin’s recycling community.

continued on page 4

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 Enviro Mechanics 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

Austin Resource Recovery Customer Service
512-494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints
512-974-3355

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

Zoning and Building Use Complaints
512-974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office
512-974-6085

OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
512-339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority
512-473-3307

CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Steve Adler 512-978-2100
Mayor Pro Tem & District 9
Council Member Kathie Tovo 512-978-2109

COUNCIL MEMBERS

District 1: Ora Houston 512-978-2101
District 2: Delia Garza 512-978-2102
District 3: Sabino Renteria 512-978-2103
District 4: Greg Casar 512-978-2104
District 5: Ann Kitchen 512-978-2105
District 6: Don Zimmerman 512-978-2106
District 7: Leslie Pool 512-978-2107
District 8: Ellen Troxclair 512-978-2108
District 10: Sheri Gallo 512-978-2110



facebook.com/austinwatershed



twitter.com/austinwatershed

continued from page 3

"This collaboration stimulates innovative and business-friendly solutions. As a 21-year member of the Austin business community, the US BCSD is excited to bring our work home to Austin," said Andrew Mangan, executive director of the US BCSD.

"Ecology Action is thrilled to be a part of bringing the practices and principles of landfill diversion that we have developed over the last 44 years into the mainstream of the Austin business community and business culture. This project is an incredibly significant milestone in our community's path toward Zero Waste," said Joaquin Mariel, former co-director of Ecology Action.

To find out more about current participants, available materials, and wish list materials, visit <http://austinmaterialsmarketplace.org>.



Congratulations to Keep Austin Beautiful Dell Youth Achievement Award winner Carlos Venegas, a 7th grader at Martin Middle School (pictured above), and finalist Lorenzo Sanchez, a senior at Eastside Memorial High School. Recipients earn this award for implementing or maintaining an outstanding youth project or activity to clean, beautify, or restore an area or promote environmental stewardship.

Current Opportunities!

FREE Clean Creek Camp: Youth ages 9-13, accompanied by an adult guardian, can enjoy trails, creeks, and springs this summer while learning! For more information and to register, visit <http://www.austintexas.gov/CleanCreekCamp>.

FREE Groundwater to Gulf Summer Institute for Texas Educators: Go caving, canoeing, hiking, and splashing in creeks while earning 22 continuing education credits! For more information and to register, visit <http://tinyurl.com/py2zmsm>.

REBATES for Business Waste Reduction: Qualifying Austin companies can save up to \$1,800 by starting, expanding or improving recycling, composting or other waste diversion programs. Funding is limited – apply now! For complete details, visit <http://austintexas.gov/zwbizrebate>.