



Eastside Environmental News

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative

Fall/Winter 2014

City of Austin and UT Give Boggy Creek a Helping Hand

The next time you want to explore a beautiful area in Austin, check out the recently improved Boggy Creek hike and bike trail! Between spring 2013 and spring 2014, University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture students and the City of Austin restored natural areas and added features to enhance the visitor experience.

UT architecture students initiated the improvements through the Public Interest Design Studio, which addresses environmental issues by working closely with community members. The students targeted two locations stretching across 1.5 miles of the Boggy Creek greenbelt.

The north end of the project, east of the MLK light rail stop, near the intersection of E. Martin Luther King Boulevard and Alexander Avenue, includes views of the creek from an old concrete plant that closed decades ago. The students built several platforms to help visitors walk down a steep slope from the high bluff to a heavily shaded area of the creek. The path provides visitors an opportunity to access the creek and appreciate nature in an urban park.

In the second section of the project, north of the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center, visitors can now enjoy a creek-facing seating area for wildlife viewing, a second seating area with a view directed up to the live oak tree canopy, and a pavilion adjacent to the senior activity center. At the pavilion, educational signage explains how human activity changed the creek by removing the natural vegetation and confining the naturally meandering creek to a concrete channel. Additionally, visitors can learn about the community that formerly resided on this spot, including residents



Neighborhood children enjoy the new additions to Boggy Creek Greenbelt

who were forced to move there in the 1920s and then forced to move away several decades later due to frequent flooding.

The City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department and Watershed Protection Department improved channel stability, reintroduced native vegetation along the creek, and extended the length of the trail.

All of these projects, directed to a community most in need, make the park a more desirable destination for neighborhood residents and community members. The transformation of this public space is a stepping stone to a healthier and more vibrant community.

For information about the UT project, visit: www.soa.utexas.edu/csd/PID/files/PID_Final_Report_2013.pdf.

For information about the City of Austin project, visit: www.austintexas.gov/boggycreekrestoration.



Oscar Garza

Field Notes...

Community Partners

Many community improvement projects are achieved through partnerships between the City, neighborhood groups, and other entities. We are grateful to our community partners and delighted to share stories in this newsletter about resulting landscape improvements and other environmental activities in East Austin. In this issue, we're highlighting a creek and trail restoration; the transformation of a former landfill; new funding to bring potentially contaminated properties back to productive use; and an entertaining, educational solar car event that was fueled by the sun, creative engineering, and adrenaline.

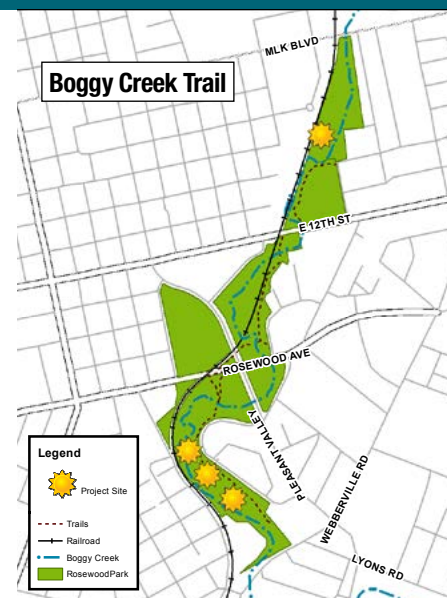
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If you would like to receive this information electronically twice each year, please visit www.austintexas.gov/PollutionPrevention.

In the Public Awareness Programs section (middle of page), click the "Subscribe to the biannual newsletter" tab.



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

EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS



Solar powered cars race around the Circuit of the Americas track

Austin Energy Powered Sun Grand Prix at Circuit of the Americas

In July, the Circuit of The Americas welcomed back the Formula Sun Grand Prix powered by Austin Energy. The free event featured a day of solar car racing, as well as exhibits and activities for all ages.

The Formula Sun Grand Prix is a unique competition that showcases the innovative design, speed, and endurance of cars powered solely by the sun. Twenty student teams from around the world designed, built, and raced solar powered electric vehicles. The teams represented colleges and universities from the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and India. The University of Michigan solar car team won 1st place, and the University of Texas at Austin solar car team took 11th place.

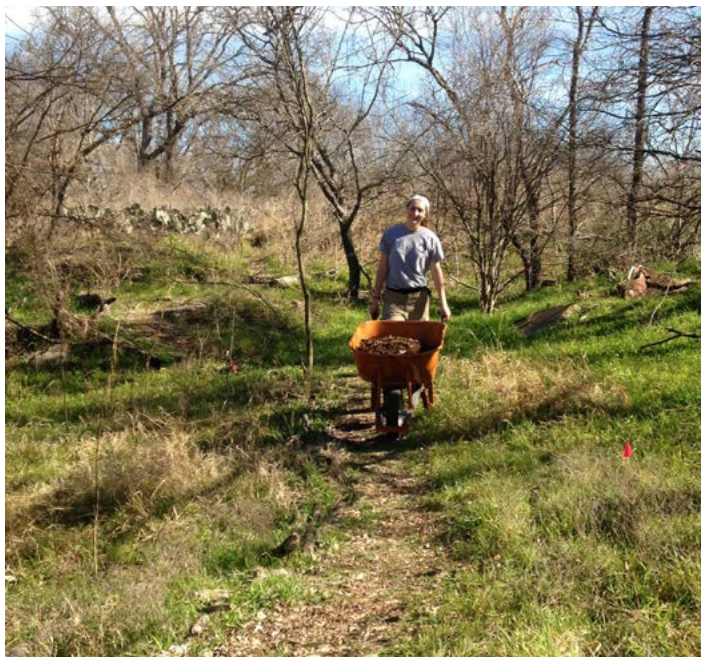
Austin Energy Solar Programs Manager Danielle Murray noted that Austin Energy's sponsorship of the Formula Sun Grand Prix is just another example of the City's support of renewable energy and the advancement of innovative technologies that help bring the costs of renewable energy down for consumers. "Electric vehicles are already gaining popularity in Austin, and perhaps one day we will all be driving clean solar cars that require no fuels except the energy from the sun," said Murray. "We cheer for the participants of the Formula Sun Grand Prix driving solar innovation and helping make yesterday's science fiction tomorrow's reality."

Event visitors also were able to race radio-controlled solar cars, participate in a children's solar model car building workshop, and visit solar technology exhibits.



Become a Shade Tree Mechanic!

Do you maintain your own vehicle? Do you change your car or truck's oil at home? Take a big step toward keeping your surroundings clean for you and your family! The Watershed Protection Department's Shade Tree Mechanic program helps reduce pollution commonly caused by home car repair. Check out the new video at <http://tinyurl.com/kknknsk>. Request a free evaluation of your car care practices and receive a free Shade Tree Mechanic oil change bucket! For more information, visit www.austintexas.gov/shadetreemechanic, or call 512-974-2550.



An AmeriCorps volunteer hauls mulch for new trails

From Trashed to Treasured Property: The Grove Landfill Story

In the late 1960s, the Grove Municipal Landfill operated as an open pit dump in the East Austin neighborhood of Montopolis. After closing in 1970, the open pit was subjected to many long years of illegal trash disposal and neglect.

The Rhizome Collective, a local grassroots environmental group, acquired the 10-acre site in 2004 with a mission to boost urban sustainability and enhance the quality of life of the surrounding community. They intended to transform the beleaguered property into an environmental justice education park, complementary to the adjacent City of Austin Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park.

Austin Receives \$400,000 from EPA to Assess Potentially Contaminated Properties

The City of Austin received \$400,000 in grant funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to assess up to 20 blighted properties for revitalization. Brownfields are abandoned or under-utilized properties where reuse of the land is complicated by the suspected or confirmed existence of hazardous chemicals, pollutants, or contaminants. Austin Resource Recovery will work with residents, nonprofits, the business community, and other City departments to identify sites that can be redeveloped into community assets.

They collaborated with the City's Brownfields Redevelopment Office and received a \$200,000 Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields grant. The federal funds were used, in part, to purchase a vegetable oil powered tractor to help clean the site. From 2005 to 2006, hundreds of volunteers helped remove more than 10 tons of trash and more than 700 tires. Huge amounts of wood scraps and concrete were reused on-site for erosion control. More than 30 tons of metals were retrieved and recycled.

In 2009, the Collective lost its base of operation in East Austin and was unable to continue the cleanup. The following year, another local environmental organization, Ecology Action, took over the site and renamed it Circle Acres. The new steward of this land has a 40-year history of environmental activism, including protesting against the landfill previously located on the site.

Although Ecology Action was very experienced in the recycling of used plastic, glass, metals, and other resources, this was the organization's first experience with "recycling" land. In 2012, Impact Austin awarded the group a grant to fund the development of Circle Acres' master plan and infrastructure improvements. Ecology Action has partnered with the internationally acclaimed green building organization Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems and Glenrose Engineering to develop long-term goals for the reclamation and remediation of this important site.

Ecology Action discovered that trashed land is one of the most difficult, but most important, resources to recycle. The group is transforming this former landfill site into an ecological treasure and community resource, as well as a model of remediating and reclaiming contaminated urban land in an environmentally-responsible and socially-equitable way.

Ecology Action plans to announce a Circle Acres grand opening in early 2015. To learn more about Circle Acres and the Grove Municipal Landfill remediation process, visit www.ecology-action.org/grove-landfill-remediation.

The ultimate goal of brownfield redevelopment is to ensure sustained livability within the Austin community into the future. In addition to reducing public exposure to hazardous materials, these grants will be a catalyst for economic development, job creation, and neighborhood sustainability and beautification in areas that need it most.

Nonprofits and local government entities can apply for a property assessment at www.austintexas.gov/brownfields, and may apply on behalf of a private developer if the project is of community benefit. The City will hold community meetings to engage stakeholders during the assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment process.

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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

2014 CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 512-974-2250
Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole 512-974-2266

2014 COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mike Martinez 512-974-2264
Laura Morrison 512-974-2258
Chris Riley 512-974-2260
Bill Spelman 512-974-2256
Kathie Tovo 512-974-2255



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The City's Brownfields Revitalization Office partners with the community to bring projects to fruition. One such successful partnership was the Guadalupe-Saldaña Net Zero Subdivision, which is built on a former brownfield site. Hundreds of tires, construction debris, and numerous other discarded items littered the site, due to years of illegal dumping. The City worked with community members, the Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and the EPA to clean the site, which is now an energy-efficient affordable housing community. Additional examples of former Austin brownfields are the African American Heritage Cultural Center, Mabel Davis Skate Park, the Homewood Heights Community Garden, and El Sapo restaurant on Manor Road.

To contact the City of Austin's Brownfields Program Manager Christine Whitney about a particular brownfield site, call 512-974-6085, or email Christine.Whitney@austintexas.gov. For more information about the grants, the public engagement process, or to sign up for email updates about the City's brownfields program, visit www.austintexas.gov/brownfields.



These lucky ladies call Blackshear Community Garden home.

Plotting to Garden? Join the Blackshear Community!

The Blackshear Community Garden, a dynamic communal growing space at 2011 East 9th Street, has individual and shared plots available for anyone interested in planting and harvesting their own vegetables, fruits, and flowers. Gardeners also pitch in to take care of the communal chickens and harvest eggs. The garden is often buzzing with educational, volunteer, and festive activities. Gardeners recently celebrated the beginning of fall with a volunteer day, clearing paths and sifting compost to prepare for a fresh new growing season. Blackshear takes part in an annual community urban farm bike ride and, throughout the year, hosts monthly volunteer days, special speakers and workshops, and a seasonal potluck.

Communal gardening is a great way to add more healthy foods and activity into your lifestyle, while meeting your neighbors and having fun! For more information about the garden, contact Liz McConnell at liz.j.mcconnell@gmail.com, or stop by and pin a note on the bulletin board.