

SHNA May 2014 meeting minutes
5/6/14

Toria English presiding
SHNA Board members present: Toria English, Hunt Andre, Louisa Brinsmade, Kirsten Siegfried,
Jeff Harris, Polina Koronkevich

Visitor: Andrew Bucknall - candidate for District 1

Meeting commences @ 7:00pm

Item #1 (30 min)

City of Austin Cemetery Master Plan by Kim McKnight

The City is holding several public meetings and inviting feedback on Austin's historic city-owned cemeteries, including Oakwood and Oakwood Annex. Ms. McKnight with the City of Austin will present an overview of the master plan process and answer questions.

Check out this link for more information

<http://www.austintexas.gov/department/cemetery-master-plan>

Kim McKnight is the project coordinator and cultural resource specialist at PARD for the Cemetery Master Plan

5 COA municipal cemeteries:

Oakwood
Oakwood Annex
Evergreen
Plummers
Austin Memorial City

Oakwood is the oldest municipal cemetery in Austin and has 40 acres. Dates from 1839 and was part of original city plat. (We were the Republic of Texas at that time).

The oldest grave marker dates from 1842 - John Black and George Dolson were hunting for bear at Zilker park and were killed by Native Americans.

In 1856 Oakwood became city property.

In 1876 Temple Beth Israel established the older portion of the Jewish cemetery.

In 1914 the Oakwood Cemetery Chapel was built; designed by notable architect Charles H. Page

In 2012, \$2 million was approved to benefit the municipal cemeteries. One of the priorities is the renovation of the Oakwood chapel. (In Ms. McKnight's opinion, it could be a phenomenal space for community events. She later qualified this by saying that such use is not approved at the

moment, but perhaps the community could work toward that goal during the Master Plan process.)

Tom Hatch is current architect on the Oakwood chapel restoration.

In 1914 - Oakwood Annex was established. The building, which is actually at the entrance there was built in 1921 and the architect was Hugo Kuehne (first dean of architecture at UT).

Oakwood is a National Register Property and COA Historic Landmark

The other cemeteries are located at:
Evergreen at East 12th and Airport
Plummers on Springdale rd
Austin Memorial Park - Hancock (2222 and MoPac)

The Master Plan objectives: historical context, examine issues, establish goals for the future, and outline a plan for achieving those goals.

The Master Plan Contractors:

1. AmaTerra – performing a tree survey and geo spatial work
2. John Millner associates -
3. McDoux – A historic preservation firm out of Houston

They are looking at:

- the existing conditions and topography
- spatial organization - relation to landscape
- Circulation - roads/curbs - big possibility for closing those smaller roads to traffic
- Vegetation, trees, shrubs, perennials
- drainage and irrigation - untenable situation in Oakwood, canal, and sprinkler systems, will be doing repairs for the summer - looking into the reclaimed water program (purple pipes)
- Buildings - underutilized and should be restored
- Masoleums
- Gravestones, tombs, family plot enclosures
- Existing walls for Oakwood on the perimeter – are barbed wire and a chain link fence appropriate for this historic site?
- Entrance gates
- New facilities and features
- Security and vandalism prevention
- Plot ownership legal issues

Oakwood has a lot of potential: Could we see it as an extension of downtown as a green space? For instance, Save Austin Cemeteries has several events that are popular for downtown visitors.

We need to consider that Oakwood needs continual operations and maintenance – we need funding mechanisms since it is not an enterprise property. We also lack proper cemetery record keeping and management software

The second Cemetery Master Plan meeting is:

Northwest Rec Center, 6-8pm Thursday, June 26 2014
2913 Northland Dr, 78757

Mike Tollison: What is the plan for the fox family in Oakwood?

McKnight: I didn't know about the foxes.

Paula Reckson: What will be the use for the Oakwood Annex building?

McKnight: Currently, it is storage space for unclaimed, dislodged headstones. It's a necessary use because we have a lot of them.

Louisa Brinsmade: What about your comment that the Chapel could be used for community space, or events?

McKnight: The chapel won't be a meeting space per se, but those types of buildings should be used as docent space or a visitors center. I believe it would be excellent for community use, and theater use.

Toria: Great job so far... short term actions? Tree watering is a concern.

McKnight: The cemetery staff are dealing with every day issues. The \$2 million bond money is handled by one team, and they will be addressing the chapel and irrigation issues. Everything we do has to be complimentary.

There is another hubbub with the cemeteries: Austin Memorial Park has a tradition of people adorning their graves with trinkets, benches, and wind chimes – of personalizing them. The city has regulations - and the enforcement has been spotty. Some criticize the enforcement and some ask for it.

We have a contractor working on that specific issue under cemetery rules and regulations – those recommendations will go before the city council during June.

Toria: suggestions/comments/communication on the short term?

McKnight: Any general issues, talk to Gilbert Hernandez at Parks and Rec

Tracy Witte: What is the plan for watering the trees in the meantime?

McKnight: They are making immediate improvements ready for the summer, but not every heritage tree has a water source nearby. We are also subject to the watering restrictions, but its part of the cemetery manager's job to identify trees in trouble. But we don't have a crew to hand water, and we have an irrigation system, but it's not in perfect working order.

The Cemetery Master Plan Implementation will be from a prioritized list, and estimated cost. There will be an implementation guide. Irrigation will be a top issue – we're still struggling with removing the dead trees before they fall over in a wind storm and crush monuments.

Toria: An outside contractor took care of it since 1990, and it wasn't until last year that the city took over management.

McKnight: We will have a tree survey for all of the 5 cemeteries. We can look at preserving and even replacing some of the canopy there.

Some of the post oaks are sensitive to overwatering. There are different strategies for each type of tree and where it is located.

Item #2 (5 min)

Urban Renewal Board (URB) meeting update - by Hunt Andre

The URB touched briefly on tracts 3 and 5. They haven't closed on the properties yet. I talked to Stowell - he expects they will close in the next week or two. The URB had some discussion of the scoring matrix, but it was non-controversial.

Item #3 (5 min)

SHNA Development Committee update - by Hunt Andre

We had our first meeting. We came up with a survey which will go out in the next 3-5 days. About 11 people have expressed interest in being on the development committee - about 8 showed up.

Toria: How often are you meeting?

Hunt: On an ad hoc basis. Start dealing with the Tracts 3 and 5 properties.

Harris Block: I'm interested in tract 3. I'm the adjacent landowner and I haven't been notified of any survey.

Hunt: The survey hasn't gone out yet.

Richard Ferris: What did you get out of the URB - same old same old?

Tracy: What are the "lessons learned"

Hunt: They were concerned with the way the city council viewed the scoring matrix, and the RFP process. I didn't have access to the information in the RFP process.

Andrew Bucknall: It's very disconnected - the real estate department is not connected to the housing dept. It ends up at city council with real estate issues. Decisions are made in closed door meetings. The URB wants to protect their position for bargaining. The scoring matrix for the first meeting was not shared with the city council, and Council Member Spelman had issues with that. The URB is regulated by the state, but it's mandated by the state that the city have a URB. Should have had partnership bet housing and real estate? And another thing we discussed is sharing the matrix with the city council. The URB's are kind of passe, because it doesn't really work. It's purpose is going to wind down as soon as they get rid of the remaining city properties.

Item #4 (5 min)

CODE Next update - by Kris Bowen

Kris: Community Character in a Box project - thank you to the neighbors who went and took pictures and uploaded to the city. I'm concerned that this project might trump current LDC plans. I'm glad that we're part of the process that allow neighbors to have input. I'd be happy to be the point person on this project.

Comprehensive review of the LDC - first public review – is May 19, called Cracking the Code, 6-8pm (info is part of the email I sent out)

Also, Speak up Austin is another opportunity for us to be involved.

July 31st is a new deadline for more information - more photos to be uploaded and suggestions. Our pictures are already coming up on the website.

Richard Ferris: What happened to Imagine Austin? We spent hours on it, and we never heard back.

Kris: I think this is part of it.

Tracy Witte: The whole point of Imagine Austin was to get us to the point where they could say Code Next is necessary.

Item #5 (10 min)

Swede Hill Neighborhood Strategic Plan / Vision for our Future – concept introduction by Sean Garretson

(Sean Garretson was unable to attend tonight's meeting)

Toria: I think part of Sean's strategic plan is to bring in UT students to create a written plan with goals.

Hunt: I like the idea of responding rather than reacting.

Rick McGee: I like this idea of getting people who will do work for you. Whenever people do work for you, that's a good thing.

Harris Block: Neighborhood plan?

Tracy: Are you talking about the CEANP?

Rick: I think Sean has a good idea, we just need to talk about it at the next meeting.

Item #6 (10 min)

Reminder of Americorps grant opportunities deadline, and discussion of ideas - by Louisa Brinsmade

(Most popular ideas given: Alley cleanup for the small grants program, and traffic-calming for the NPP bigger grants program.)

Item #7 (5 min)

Wes Peoples update - by Louisa Brinsmade

Spoke with Ken Blaker and Wes Peoples a week earlier. They are still planning on residential condo-style development, with height limit of 30'. At the moment, they have no site plan, and they are stabilizing the leases on the three compound houses to achieve year-long leases. They would be happy to meet with our development committee over the summer

Item #8 (5 min)

1307 Waller rezoning update - by Louisa Brinsmade

Item #9 (5 min)

Andrew Bucknall – candidate for District 1

Bucknall: I want to extend an invitation to our kickoff party on May 17. I went to Huston-tillotson, and grew up in a historic house in downtown Austin on 9th and West. (Refers to Butler Equity with story from the 1980s):

Butler was going to connect MoPac and used FOIIC – I found out there were questionable deals, so we zoned the house historic so they couldn't tear it down. That issue ushered in the age of the green council.

I ran against Lee Leffingwell for mayor and lost. I am friends with Ann Richards... I am Chairman of the URB, whoever wants it, gets the job. Its a thankless job.

I want to thank you for the input from your neighborhood on the URB. As a city council member, I want input. I want to make sure the historic areas are protected.

I've lived in district 1 for 16 years.

District one boundaries are: 6th St, east of 1-35. It takes in capitol and UT, Mueller not included.

One of the good things is, I don't have David Butts as a consultant

I want to provide an opportunity for you to have a voice.