



OCTOBER 1, 1990

STREAMLINING OR STEAMROLLING?

Michael Curry & Lee Jones

The lifeblood of neighborhood and environment preservation is public participation. This includes the right to know about proposed real estate developments, the right to comment upon them, and the right to be heard by our elected officials.

Changes to our City ordinances proposed by City staff, which will substantially limit those rights, were protested by nearly two dozen speakers on September 25th before the Planning Commission. The City Council members need to hear from you before then, letting them know you do not approve of the proposed changes.

The 1984 zoning ordinance called for site plans to be reviewed when a project was considered for re-zoning. Three years later, in the course of "streamlining" the development process, site plan review by the community was postponed until a point at or near construction--by which time, of course, zoning hearings were over.

Now, another three years later, further "streamlining" would completely eliminate the public's right to appeal a site plan, provided that the applicant "fully complies with the regulations". The catch is that (1) the amendment gives the staff the right to waive without notice to the community certain standards (called "compatibility standards"), including those pertaining to height limitations, setback requirements, and traffic impact analysis; and (2) the amendments also provide authorization to staff to broaden their ability to waive compatibility standards, again without notice to the community!

Presently, small additions to an existing structure ("small projects") do not require notice to the community, provided certain conditions are met. The proposed amendment would re-define "small projects" to include larger development projects, including new construction--such as a fast-food restaurant or a convenience store, which will have a tremendous impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

One gets a clue as to how readily staff might waive compatibility standards (remember, with no concern for public review), when one learns that staff wants to change the requirement for a traffic impact analysis to a "traffic assessment", and sees no need for an assessment unless the proposed project would generate 400 trips per day! THINK...IN A 7 HOUR DAY, THIS IS NEARLY 1 TRIP EVERY MINUTE. The current standard is for projects that generate 75 trips per day.

If this amendment passes and problems emerge through staff oversight, incompetence, favoritism, or inability to resist development pressure, it will be too late to correct the damage done to a neighborhood. As a matter of fact, a related amendment would allow developers to begin work on a project pending final site plan approval, and developers who took advantage of the so-called fast-track option would not be subject to the notification and appeal process at all.

Maybe you have every confidence that City staff will always keep your best interests in the forefront of their concern--but we wouldn't bet the farm. Failure to exercise the third right mentioned in the opening paragraph may mean loss of the first two. It's up to you.

A UNIQUE ARBORETUM--On October 25th, twenty-five trees will be planted on the Bryker Woods Elementary School grounds. This will be the first installment in a ten year program to plant more than 250 native trees & shrubs at the school and on neighboring Shoal Creek park land.

"It's an opportunity to share in the restoration of our local ecosystem," explains Bonnie Crozier, landscape designer, resource botanist with the National Wildflower Research Center, and a project coordinator of the new Bryker Woodland Project. "The Bryker Woods neighborhood is being positively encouraged to get involved in creating a woodland landscape at its own school--an arboretum which will be unique to the Bryker Woods area."

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN OUR OWN BACKYARD--Bonnie is working with PTA president emeritus Barbara Wilson and Bryker Woods resident Kim Valentine, who together dreamed up the Bryker Woodland Project. Their first idea was to add a few trees to the new playscape at the school. Now, with the encouragement of the PTA, AISD, the Austin HeLeat Council and other organizations, they are working on a ten year program which will create the arboretum and outdoor classrooms, new environmental educational programs for children and adults, a sustainable landscape which will lower the school's maintenance and energy costs, and special workshops in landscaping and conservation.

DOES YOUR GARDEN HAVE PLACES WHERE NOTHING GROWS?--"On Saturday, October 13th, we are holding a really interesting workshop for the whole neighborhood in restoring soil in the area where the new trees are going in", says Kim Valentine. "The first 25 trees are going in around the new portable classroom at the corner of Kerbey Lane and 33rd Street. The soil there is hard, dry and compacted--not too different from the problem I've had in my own back yard."

John Dromgoole, of Garden-ville Nurseries, will be among those demonstrating how to deal with compacted soil at the workshop on Saturday, October 13th from 11 to 2, at the school. Thunderhead Soils' "Roger Root Wrangler" and Richard Fadal of TexasScapes will hold special workshops on planting for the kids. KLRU producer and program host Tom Spencer is scheduled to film a segment for "Central Texas Gardener."

"This is a rare opportunity to learn not only how to plant a tree properly, but how to aerate soil and make it come alive again," says Phyllis Warren, PTA Buildings and Grounds liaison. "That part of the school ground will get a new lease on life. John Dromgoole know how to make it simple and clear--and inexpensive. If you want to give your garden a healthy new start, be there on the 13th. And bring your children!"

A GIFT FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD--Barbara Wilson, Bryker Woodland Project chairperson, wants to make sure every Bryker Woods resident has a chance to get involved in the new program, whether as a docent/teacher, a designer, a gardener, a tree enthusiast, or computer networker..."We need everyone!" she says. "We have very active teachers and parents at the school already. Local businesses are donating classrooms and some exciting new programs coming from local and national environmental education organizations. Let us know how you'd like to participate."

Contact: The Bryker Woodland Project at 451-9679, 472-2803, 458-5756
1707 West 29th Street, Austin 78703

As some of you know from our last general meeting, the permit for the Seton incinerator has been formally put on "hold" by the Seton administration. If the application is not re-activated within six months of June 14, the process will have to be started over. Since the hospital plans to burn its regular solid waste, the Texas Department of Health has become involved as the primary licensing agency, with the Texas Air Control Board conducting an air quality review. The City of Austin Solid Waste Advisory Commission has asked the neighborhood to voice its concerns regarding the incinerator and may hold a public hearing on this matter in the near future. We feel pleased that citizen action has had a cautionary effect on people making important health & environmental decisions. Thanks to all neighbors who have helped in achieving this goal. Ultimately, waste reduction & recycling must be the primary focus of solid waste disposal of any kind.

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KOENIG LANE MOBILITY PLAN

Tom Shetelman

On Wednesday, Sept. 5, the BWNA Executive Committee voted unanimously to support the Koenig Lane Mobility Plan proposed by the Allandale-Brentwood Neighborhood Association. This plan and one by County Commissioner Bruce Todd both call for widening Koenig Lane, with improved left turn accommodation at intersections. Both are considerably scaled down from a State Highway limited-access freeway proposal that is visualized as part of a Greater Austin Roadway Plan.

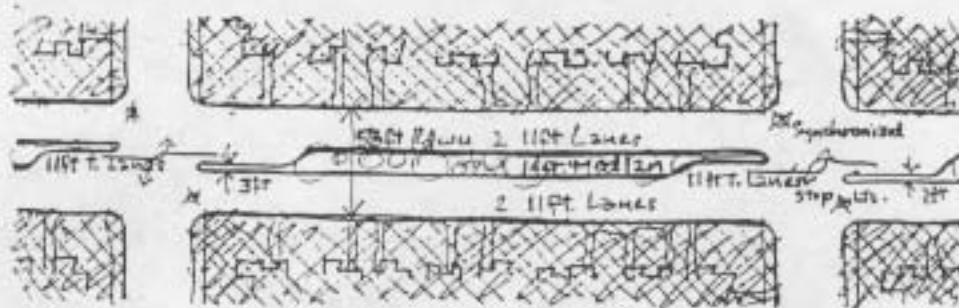
The Koenig Lane Mobility Plan differs from the Todd proposal by:

- 1) Rejection of Lamar & Burnet underpasses proposed by Todd
- 2) Widening Koenig Lane to four 11-foot through-traffic lanes divided by a 14-foot landscaped median strip containing left turn lanes at intersections, as opposed to the Todd proposal for four 12-foot through-traffic lanes each side of a 12-foot "chicken" lane, all to be widened at intersection approaches to a total of six 12-foot lanes.

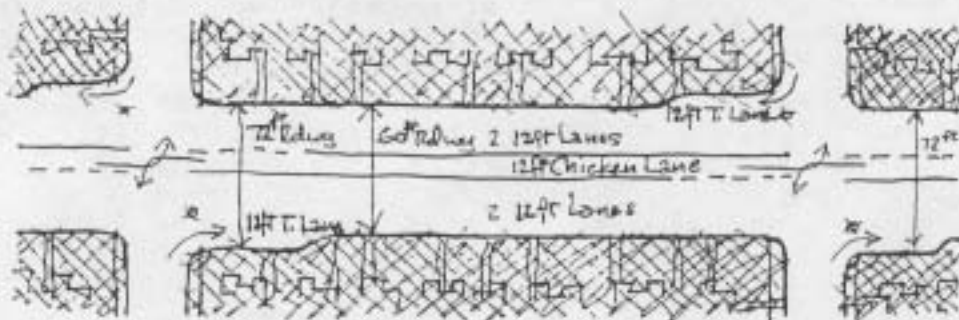
Twelve-foot lanes are State Highway standards that must be followed to qualify for state funds. However, Allandale-Brentwood advocate Alice Wightman pointed out that State funds would not be necessary without the expense of the two underpasses. Also, 11-foot lanes for city streets are common practice.

The BWNA Executive Committee also agreed with the following reasons for supporting the Mobility Plan:

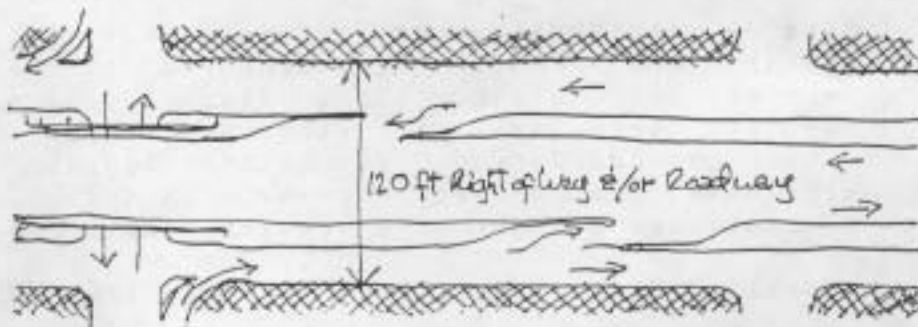
- 1) Koenig Lane is approximately 3 to 5 miles south of U.S. 183 (now under construction as a controlled-access cross town freeway). This is considerably less than the five or more miles separation between thoroughfares advocated by most urban transportation planners.
- 2) The proposed underpasses or "grade-separated intersections at Lamar and Burnet will involve property acquisition to expand the current 60 to 80-foot right of way to a 150-foot right of way for "street improvements" for 750 feet in either direction from those intersections. It takes little imagination to realize the traumatic effect this may have on existing homes and businesses in the area, let alone upon neighborhood accessibility.



KOENIG LAKE MOBILITY PLAN



BRUCE TODD'S PLAN



TYPICAL LIMITED ACCESS ROADWAY

THEY CAME, THEY INVESTIGATED, THEY CLEANED UP!

Irene Pickhardt

Three cheers for the Environmental Investigators in the City of Austin Environmental and Conservation Services. The water in Shoal Creek had a strong gasoline smell and oily slick on Friday, September, 14th. The City's environmental hotline was called and within an hour, investigators were at the creek making tests, tracking the source of the chemical, then cleaning up the mess. You may have noticed the crew working over the weekend; they used booms to contain the chemical and absorptive materials to sop it up. About 75% of the chemical was retrieved before the rest washed downstream.

Unfortunately, neighbors who live along the creek still reported a large fish kill. Susan Gutzke worried about the soft shell turtles which live in Shoal Creek, and Bryker Woods Elementary School kindergarten teacher, Marion Coffee, hopes the fish will be there when she takes her kindergarten class on the annual fall fishing trip to stock their aquarium.

According to environmental investigator, Charles Lesniak, the laboratory now believes the chemical may have been diesel fuel. It was coming from the Seton area, but so far the cause of the spill hasn't been determined. (It most likely had nothing to do with Seton Hospital; any time fluids are dumped in the storm sewers they flow into the creek.

If you notice that the creek smells or looks funny, report your findings to the ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE immediately. Prompt reporting