Minutes WPNA meeting

May 10, 2014

Martin Luecke called the meeting to order.

Newcomers/ new neighbors introduced themselves.

Martin thanked newsletter delivery people and called for volunteers to deliver on the 1400 block of Corona.

Martin asked sponsors to introduce themselves. Newsletter sponsorships are a great way to get your name out in the neighborhood and they support the newsletter publication.

Minutes were adopted. Minutes will be posted on the windsorpark.info website after the neighborhood meeting.

**Guest speaker : Chief Appraiser from Travis Central Appraisal District, Marya Crigler**

Houses are appraised based on a variety of factors including the sales price of the property if you were to sell it as of January 1. This past year there were 79 sales, with an average sales price of $285,000. There is a lack of supply and high demand for housing, which has created an upward push on value.

The City of Austin has decided to lower the tax rates because values have gone up. But the urban rail bond proposal could add 6 cents to the tax rates. We need to vote whether we want the service and whether we’re willing to pay more on our taxes.

There are protections available to property owners – if it is your principal place of residence the home is eligible for the homestead exemption if you file for it. Under the homestead exemption the appraised value can go up a max of 10%. It’s not too late to file for the homestead exemption this year. The deadline is a year after April 30 for a late filing. If you have already filed for an exemption it will be noted under exemptions on the Notice of Appraised Value as “HS.” They affirm that the property is the homestead by checking to see that the driver’s license address matches the address of the property being filed as the homestead.

Values will continue to go up next year, so we will probably see appreciations next year as well. It is estimated that this market will continue to grow at this rate through 2017 because of continued growth.

Travis County offers a 20% Homestead Exemption. City of Austin doesn’t offer a homestead exemption at all, so Crigler suggested we could go to the council to request a homestead exemption.

If the homeowner is over 65 or disabled there are additional exemptions for AISD. The AISD tax will freeze the ceiling for the taxes in the year you qualify. The other taxing units (city, county) do not offer the freeze.

Another issue to bring up to the state government concerns taxation for AISD. The local school districts do not get to keep all the money – AISD gives back 1/3 of the money they collect to Texas to redistribute it within the state. So this is an issue property owners can petition state government to change.

Why did land value go up but house value declined? There is a trend in Austin for people buying the land and demolishing the structure on it and building new. So TCAD estimates that the value of the land is higher than the value of the structure.

TCAD looks at the Windsor Park neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods to make the appraisal. The appraisal district looks at filed building permits in determining the value of the structures.

Texas is not a sales disclosure state. The TCAD cannot get all sales. If we have sales that they are not aware of, we should bring in the information so they can have better information in assessing values. They are not allowed to have a subscription for MLS. They get information from individuals or picking up sales sheets as they are out in the communities. If the state required the disclosure of the sales, that would improve TCAD’s ability to assess more accurately.

Large businesses and corporation exploit loopholes to reduce their tax burden. Businesses will bring lawsuits against TCAD for their assessments. When the large corporations win their lawsuits challenging TCAD’s appraisal, TCAD has to pay their attorney fees. And when the values are decreased, that sets the property values for all other businesses lower.

If you are over 65 you don’t have to pay taxes, because they can’t take your house away from you, until you die. You have to request a deferral, and interest will accrue during that time, but won’t need to be paid off until the death of the homeowner.

If you are not over 65 and have a hard time paying taxes, TCAD will work with you on a payment plan, and will not go after your home if you are meeting the agreement.

TCAD doesn’t have the right to interior inspection, so they do judge value based on exterior appearance. They measure all properties from the exterior. They will look for something significant to the structure of the house (new windows, doors). If there are problems in the interior of the house (ex: cracked slab) they cannot see it so the homeowner can challenge the appraisal by showing pictures of the interior.

If a permit has been filed they will look to see what it is and judge value based on that.

TCAD considers the purchase price of the property to be the best judge of the value, so they will use recent sales to determine the appraisals when they can get that data.

The process of filing a protest with TCAD: When people protest the assessment the homeowner will get a comparable sales grid, an equity grid (all properties in the neighborhood), and a list of all sales in the neighborhood. People will be scheduled for an informal hearing, and most of the time it can be resolved with the appraiser. The next phase is a hearing, two weeks after the informal hearing. The appraisal review board is 36 citizens selected by the judge. They will hear cases in panels of 3. If people are still not satisfied after the panel hearing, arbitration or file a suit in district court.

Pictures are really good for protesting taxes. If there are issues with the property, or a neighbors’ house that is very comparable and bring in pictures showing similarities.

In Windsor Park we can find houses with the exact same floor plans, because the original property developers used the same plans throughout the neighborhood and those can be used as comps.

If you have recently refinanced and had an appraisal done, you can bring in the appraisal.

TCAD appraises every year. They have to be as close as possible to the market value.

It is possible to get the land valuation lowered if you have documentation that your location is less desirable than neighbors’ houses. If there are listing prices on parcels of land, you can bring that in and it could change the value.

City of Austin voted to lower the tax rate by about 2 cents per $100.

Tax rates have to be set in September by the council members by looking at the budget and deciding what they’d need to cover the regular expenditures of the city. Citizens can look at the budget and see whether they agree with the decisions made by the council.

The effective tax rate is published in the newspapers, which is the limit for the tax rates. Bond elections will also push the rate higher.

The average increase in valuation from this year to last was around 18-20%.

TCAD comes out whenever there’s a permit or notice that a property has changed. They will visit every property every 4 years.

They don’t always know what properties are being used for (stealth dorms, halfway houses, etc) so it does help to bring in documentation about aspects of the neighborhood that are detrimental to the value of the house.

Crigler was not able to affirm that hiring an agent to help bring your values down will have a substantially different result than when property owners representing themselves. The key is to bring in information that the appraisal district does not already have.

You need to get market value below the appraised value to see a reduction in taxes.

About 70% of protests are resolved in informal hearings.

**Yard of the Month** is 5400 Wellington Drive, owned by Fran Adams and Kit Brooking. They have a xeric yard. They will be receiving a $50 gift certificate to Shoal Creek Nursery. You can nominate yourself or a neighbor by contacting the Yard of the Month committee, wpna.yom@gmail.com

Many people said they are interested in the garden tour, which hasn’t been held for a couple of years.

**Park Committee**

Jeanette Swenson announced that June 14 is the neighborhood celebration of the opening of the pool. It will open on June 7. She encouraged everyone to advocate for safe crossing over 51st street at HEB and the pool entrance. There is a traffic study being done. She recommended that we email City of Austin transportation department.

Splash pad will open on May 17. The pool schedule is in the newsletter. There will be a variety of activities at the pool (classes, etc)

We are still raising funds for the shades over the playscapes. Our neighborhood has contributed $8000 - $3000 from the neighborhood association and $5000 in individual donations. We are hoping for matching donations from HEB, Frost Bank, IBC, etc.

There will be a big event in the park on May 17. Keep Austin Beautiful is partnering with Bud Lite to paint, mulch, etc from 9-12. Afterward they are partnering with Austin Film Studios and Bud Lite will be offering beer. They have been talking to Travis County constables to ensure safe crossing at this event.

Park Stewards meet on Friday mornings from 9-11, though they will probably be moving that to an earlier time with the summer approaching.

Question about a dog park: A dog park is on the master plan, but the issue might be finding the space. One of the ballfields might need to be removed to accommodate it. Jeanette suggested advocating directly with Austin Parks and Rec.

WPNA put in plants at the 290 and Berkman median. Barton Springs Nursery donated many plants. We have a watering crew set up.

Patton Lane Park: 2 acres were purchased by the city. It was purchased by the city in January and hasn’t yet been transferred to Parks and Rec.

Habitat Challenge: We are going to sign up again. Wildlife Austin has fee waivers. If you’ve certified your yard in the past, they’ve added a pollinator certification.

**School committee:**

There will be a happy hour next week, May 16 at the Nomad. Nomad will donate a portion of the sales to the Reagan Scholarship, so the bigger the turnout, the better for us!

Everyone can weigh in on the superintendent search online. We also plan on going to the school board and making suggestions about what to look for in a superintendent.

Working with the Mueller Neighborhood, we gave gift baskets of Hershey’s kisses and mandarin oranges with signs for teacher appreciation week and dropped them off at the 5 neighborhood schools – Pearce, Harris, Blanton, Andrews, and Reagan.

**Pool Party June 14**

Synchronized swim team: Some of the executive committee is creating a synchronized swim team to perform at the pool party. Tuesday there will be rehearsal. Fundraising – putting money toward the shades over the playscape. They will be putting out a call to sponsor the team. They will be practicing at Mueller pool. Right now there are about 6 people signed up to participate.

There will be a diving demonstration. We are also working on getting the fee waived for admission on that day so everyone can go in for free.

**Treasurer’s report:**

Dana Newlove keeps track of the membership – we are at 189 members, plus some additional members who joined today.

Rebecca Carpenter presented the report.

**Mueller Community:**

10th anniversary party is today.

Mueller is about 1/3 of the way developed. City Council will introduce on May 22 to develop a pilot program for parking. Parking will eventually be paid over there. There will be a Mueller Commission meeting this week at Carver Library.

Twin Liquors has opened.

Mobility 35 – plans continue to change. They have abandoned the superstreet idea. They are still looking at closing a lot of entrance and exit ramps. Northbound the last exit will be at Manor road, and then after 51st street will be the next one that exits. Insync – North Central I35 Coalition – they are meeting to discuss changes coming to I-35. It might be worthwhile to have TXDoT people come to a neighborhood meeting again to update us.

**Announcements**:

Laura Presly is running for District 4 council. There will be a 2 pm kick off party at Cantina Pappasitos today.

There’s a new app for a smartphone for voting. It will give data on the elections. It’s called the Voting app.

Meeting adjourned.