

## CALL TO ACTION

### CITY OF AUSTIN PLANS MAJOR PROJECT FOR NEIGHBORHOOD GREENBELT

The City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department has proposed a major project that will alter the environment on the Willowbrook Reach, our large neighborhood greenbelt that snakes along the Upper Boggy Creek from Cherrywood Road to 38-1/2 Street.

The Reach is beloved by neighbors, herons, turtles, frogs, butterflies, and many more. The property is home to more than 100 trees, wildflowers (many of which are blooming now), fossils, yellow-crowned night herons, Coopers hawks, and myriad other birds, insects, fish and amphibians. It's also where neighbors go to walk our dogs, run for exercise, and generally find relief from our urban environment. It's an oasis and, if you haven't discovered it yet, I highly recommend walking down and checking it out.

Mike Kelly, project leader with Watershed Protection, says that his department assessed conditions at the Reach eight or nine years ago and at the time, they found our greenbelt with steeply eroding banks, exposed water and wastewater lines, and potential flooding dangers, among other issues. That assessment formed the basis for funding that was approved by City of Austin voters in the 2006 Bond Election for projects on the Upper Boggy Creek, including the Willowbrook Reach.

The City has now been working on the project for three years with contracted engineers and landscape architects. The Friends and Lovers of Willowbrook Reach (FLWR) recently learned that the design phase of the Watershed project is now 90 percent complete.

The current City plan proposes to regrade the banks of the Reach's creek to a gentler slope and realign the flow of the water. As a result of this regrading and realignment, the City will have to remove almost all trees - from large mature pecans to small willows - within the creek bed and an area just surrounding it. Trees and plantings further from the creek and nearer to the streets will be left alone. Some steeper creek banks may be left intact in the Plan, but they are likely to be reinforced to prevent erosion. Some portions of the creek bed will be raised and new riffles and pools will be created. Plans call for replanting the area with native and non-invasive trees and perennials, and for installing several rainwater swales planted with perennials in an effort to filter runoff.

It is probable that most wildlife will be displaced and may keep a clear distance from the greenbelt for at least a year or two-if not longer. The regrading and realignment will also result in two exposed wastewater pipes becoming unexposed.\*

The City expects to start digging in March 2011.

One of the problems with all of this is that these plans have come to 90 percent completion without the input of the Cherrywood Neighborhood at large. Thus, many of you may be hearing about this for the first time. Therefore, members of the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association and FLWR have requested that the City put a hold on its project until they can present their ideas to the Cherrywood Neighborhood.

As of this writing, Mike Kelly has agreed to place a temporary hold on the project, to step back and reapproach. He and his team will be reassessing the condition of the Reach over the next week or two. He says that conditions along the greenbelt have changed since their initial assessment years ago, and that it's possible that their current plan needs revising. We believe that this reassessment must include our neighborhood input. This is a huge project, and it's imperative that all Cherrywood neighbors have a say in its direction.

***Neighbors: this project could change the Willowbrook Reach greenbelt forever. We at FLWR urge you to become involved in the process and attend the quarterly meeting of the Cherrywood Neighborhood Association on Wednesday, May 19 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. at Maplewood Elementary so we may update you on the process.***

For more information about the Watershed Project, please contact project managers George Walker (974-3376, [george.walker@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:george.walker@ci.austin.tx.us)) and Christina Calvery (974-7094, [christina.calvery@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:christina.calvery@ci.austin.tx.us)).

If you would like to become involved with the Friends and Lovers of Willowbrook Reach (FLWR), contact us at [flwr78722@gmail.com](mailto:flwr78722@gmail.com) or follow our blog online at <http://flwr.blogspot.com>.



We look forward to your involvement with the Willowbrook Reach.

Lee Clippard, Chair  
Friends and Lovers of Willowbrook Reach (FLWR)

*\* There is a third exposed pipe in the creek that is a water supply pipe. That pipe will be dysfunctional and removed after a water pipe replacement project along Sycamore Street. Note that the Austin Water Utility project along Sycamore is not the same as the Watershed Project described here. The orange fencing you will see go up at the Reach this month is to protect the property from the water pipe project along Sycamore. The water pipe project is expected to be complete in July 2010.*