

Minutes from the July 21, 2021, Hancock Neighborhood Association regular meeting  
Submitted by secretary Robyn Ross

President Coan Dillahunty called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

Carolyn Palaima moved that we adopt the minutes from the May meeting, and the motion was seconded.

Coan said that the **Hancock Golf Course survey was not presented by PARD at the June 22 meeting** because other agenda items ran long. This may be discussed at the August 24 meeting **[update: It will be discussed at a just-posted special called meeting August 5]**. If you want to speak at this meeting, you have to sign up in advance, and speakers are generally heard (via phone) at the beginning of the meeting.

Coan said that the **Hancock Recreation Center has been open only for daytime youth programs** this summer. At some point in the fall PARD may notify us about reopening for group meetings like ours.

Carolyn Palaima reported that the **Parks Committee has submitted the CAPP (Community Activated Parks Projects) info to the Austin Parks Foundation**. (CAPP is the mechanism for doing work on public parkland and accessing HNA funds held at APF.) This CAPP relates to maintenance and erosion prevention on the recent trail work.

Coan delivered the **treasurer's report** in treasurer Bruce Fairchild's absence. The beginning balance in our checking account on May 19 was \$4757.91. We received \$30 in dues and paid \$500 for the first two issues of the newsletter, as well as a \$3.50 bank fee, putting our ending balance at \$4284.41. Our money market account accrued 4 cents of interest to end at \$2509.54.

#### **Our first speakers were from the City of Austin Homeless Strategy Division.**

-Charles Loosen, the community engagement officer, gave some basics until Dianna Grey joined us after a meeting with the mayor.

**-Charles is involved with the HEAL initiative, a pilot program to resolve four high-priority encampments across the city. They are halfway through that effort.** Last week the office closed an encampment at Ben White and Menchaca and relocated 15 people to the Southbridge shelter acquired as part of the city's hotel conversion strategy.

-People in the HEAL initiative have been assigned funding and a case manager and typically get into housing in 60 days.

**-Southbridge was a "ProLodge,"** a protective lodge for high-risk unsheltered people during the pandemic. **Going forward, it will be "bridge shelter," which provides housing for people between an encampment and more permanent housing.**

-This shelter is non-congregant, which is preferred among people experiencing/leaving homelessness because of the privacy and security of having their own room. They can decompress and work with a case manager on next steps. 95% of people at the HEAL sites have accepted the offer of bridge shelter.

-From there they typically go to rapid rehousing, in which the city covers rent and utilities until people get income from benefits, pension or employment.

-Some move into permanent supportive housing (PSH) if they have high needs: a permanent disability or more advanced age that prevents them from working. PSH offers wraparound support with case management, life skills and sometimes medical/nutritional support. Austin

lacks sufficient PSH, and the city is converting hotels/motels to PSH as one strategy to increase its supply.

Robyn: **How many people in Austin are currently experiencing homelessness?**

Charles: **“Sheltered” homeless** include people living at shelters like the ARCH, Safe Alliance and Southbridge – they are moving toward permanent housing. **“Unsheltered” homeless** describes those at public encampments.

**-The organization ECHO typically does a point-in-time count, a local census of the homeless population, but did not do that this year due to Covid.** Another way to calculate the city’s homeless population is “service-based enumeration,” looking at the people who are included in the city’s homelessness response system because they are receiving services. Another method uses census data, which isn’t available yet.

**-This year ECHO used a couple methods to come up with an estimate.** Remember, over the course of a year, many more people experience homelessness than at a single point in time. People with “episodic” homelessness can lean on their support networks or access safety-net programs. “Chronic” homelessness tends to describe more visible homelessness.

Here’s a link to ECHO’s estimates, including a **point-in-time estimate of 2506 people in 2020.**  
<https://www.austinecho.org/about-echo/homelessness-in-austin/>

Here’s a link to ECHO’s dashboard of housing types: [https://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AustinCoCDashboardPhase1\\_20210714\\_update.html](https://www.austinecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/AustinCoCDashboardPhase1_20210714_update.html)

Robyn: **Can you talk about the impact of Proposition B, which banned public camping?**

Charles: **APD is moving into its third phase of implementation, which is mainly education and outreach, but in some cases APD will issue citations.** If a person is cited or arrested for camping, APD tries to connect them with the Downtown Austin Community Court, which is geared toward their circumstances.

**-City staff have narrowed the sites for designated camping to two:** one off Manor Road and one in the Convict Hill area. There will be public engagement, including the SpeakUpAustin website and meetings, about this. The goal is to give people a place that has resources (nearby bus stop, restroom facilities), not just open land.

Robyn: **Can you talk about the Summit that happened this spring?**

Charles: **This event yielded a goal of housing 3,000 people above and beyond our current rates of housing people, in the next three years.** The goal is to achieve equilibrium – housing the same number of people who become homeless at any time – and then move toward functional zero, which includes preventing people from ever becoming homeless. It’s an ambitious goal that requires us to build system capacity.

Robyn: **What can we do to help?**

Charles: If you have a unit you want to rent, possibly through the Section 8 voucher program, contact Housing and Planning at the City of Austin.

**-Stay in contact with your council member about solid policies and evidence-based practices that are worthy of public support.**

**-RE:** volunteering, there are many informal advocacy groups on social media; also, groups like Front Steps, Caritas and Family Eldercare use volunteers. In HEAL/bridge shelter, we have heard that people in shelter are interested in social enrichment and integration because they’ve been out of contact with society for a while – this could be a volunteer opportunity.

**Dianna Grey, the city's homeless strategy officer, arrived, and Robyn introduced her and asked why she pursued this job.**

Dianna: The 'moment' was very compelling for me. Homelessness is a crisis for anyone experiencing it, but in the past 3-5 years, especially after the camping ban was rescinded in 2019, it has become more visible and more of a pain point. But we as a city are well positioned to do something about it.

**Robyn: Where are the new resources/money/political will coming from that will make the Summit goals possible?**

Dianna: The city was already doing a lot but not articulating it well. The Downtown Austin Alliance and Chamber had already started planning the Summit when I started this job. The goal is to increase by 3,000 (over the next three years) the number of people we house, beyond the 1700-1800 people we rehouse each year already. We need to be serious about equity; African Americans are less than 10% of the local population but 35% of those experiencing homelessness.

**-We identified a gap of \$300 million we would need over the next 3 years. The City of Austin has committed \$100 million and is talking with Travis County about the need to match that. That leaves \$100 million to raise in private funds.**

**Questions from attendees**

Linda Guerrero: **Is the motel at I-35 and 32<sup>nd</sup> "bridge housing"?** What is its capacity, and are people asked to share rooms? Are social work and medical staff available?

Dianna: **That Days Inn was a ProLodge through early June and has been vacant since then.** We do generally have operations and case management staff on site. At Southbridge, residents are immediately connected with a case worker whose job is to get them into permanent housing.

-The focus of shelter like this is not just shelter "tonight" but linked services to get them into housing. That Days Inn has about 60 rooms, of which a few are designated for offices. We have talked about sharing rooms, but Covid risk levels are a factor. Capacity is generally 50-55 persons.

Linda: **Multiple city departments (like Watershed) have a percentage of their budgets going to the houseless crisis. What departments are involved and what % of their budget is targeted to this?**

Dianna: There are many departments involved, but there's not a designated percentage. For example, Austin Resource Recovery has a cleanup contract for abandoned campsites in watershed areas. PARD has outreach workers. Public Works also has a cleanup contract.

Follow-up questions from Linda G (to be answered later):

-Will there be data-tracking -- intake and follow-up -- with people who come into bridge?

-Will there be any potential new COA ordinances that will address the houseless crisis for these people – is there potential change in ordinances for how we deal with this in future?

-How will the city handle disruption of I-35/TxDOT as they go through the NEPA process, and do you have a specific plan crafted for how we address that?

Carolyn Palaima: **Is the city taking notes from the Foundation Communities model, which has wraparound services for families, and social workers on site?**

Dianna: The City of Austin is probably the biggest funder of Foundation Communities projects and is in on every one of their deals. That model of services on site is permanent supportive housing (PSH). Our partnership with FC will be part of the effort to produce the 1,000+ units we want to build for the 3,000 additional people we'll house.

Carolyn: **Is the focus in Austin on the chronically homeless** – the people who don't necessarily want to move into shelter/housing – and can we expand that conversation (particularly in the media) to include families, elderly, disabled, and people that fell through the cracks, to get public support?

Dianna: Our strategy encompasses both the chronically homeless but also people who recently became homeless and need fewer resources to get back on their feet.

-The idea that people don't really want housing doesn't bear out if you are able to offer them the kind of resources they actually need to keep them stable. 95%+ of people engaged in HEAL said Yes, we want to get into shelter and housing.

David Guarino's questions: **What will happen to the federal funds if city doesn't match them?** Will Travis County match them? Will the city funds be reappropriated if it doesn't raise the match money?

Dianna: It's up to Council, which has held back the lion's share of those dollars until they get the county and private commitment. The county has discussed contributing \$60-100 million and we're seeing what happens in upcoming meetings. I hope we'll make progress with county and other funding and at least see incremental release of those funds.

**Councilmember Kathie Tovo:** The city has steadily increased its investment in homelessness in the past 5 years, and I've led on a lot of these initiatives, but we haven't always articulated how the city is involved.

-This is one of my and council's top priorities, and it's my expectation that we will invest a large amount of our federal dollars in homelessness service and housing. I crafted the legislation that made our participation contingent on the matching funds. **We need major private-sector funding for homelessness that we haven't seen yet in Austin, or we'll have to revise our goals.**

Question: **How does Community First! fit in?**

Dianna: Their first phase housed 200-250 people, and their second will have a similar number, and they have a waitlist. It's permanent housing, so it's not available to us for shelter.

-CF wants to build housing for 1400 more over the next 10 years. For our 3-year timeline, many people who could be housed with subsidies could move there; our work will continue after the 3 years, and their bold goal of 1400 will be part of the plan. It's part of the portfolio, but it's not a fit for all people, or the whole solution.

Question: **What is the process of fundraising from the private sector?**

Dianna: The Summit leadership group is tasked with the private fundraising. The chair is Lynn Meredith, and the group is in conversations with large foundations and individuals.

**The next presenter was Lonny Stern, manager of business and community partnerships for the Austin Transit Partnership.** He began by explaining that transit is a solution to a "geometry problem" – it's getting hard to move increasing numbers of people in Austin through the same amount of space. That challenge is not all-or-nothing, though; if you bike, take the bus or carpool once a week you're still making a big difference.

**Project Connect is a transit plan that includes light rail, an expansion of regional rail, a downtown transit tunnel, more MetroRapid bus routes, more stations, additional Metro Express bus service from the suburbs, park-and-rides, converting everything to electric including Metro Bike, and an on-demand circulator service** ("like Lyft, but \$1.25 door to door within a zone"). In November, Austin voters approved an initial investment in Project Connect.

The longer-range plan (represented as dotted lines on the map) is not funded. One long-term plan is the Gold Line through our neighborhood, which will start as a bus and may convert to rail in the future.

**Orange Line:** a rail line that is basically on the path of the 801 MetroRapid from Tech Ridge to Southpark Meadows down Lamar. The initial investment is between the 183/Lamar transit center and Stassney. Goes through a tunnel in downtown and under the river.

**Blue Line:** a rail line that is “interlined” (same as the Orange) from its north end to Republic Square, goes underground through downtown, crosses the river on a bridge, and goes to the airport.

These two lines will run every 10 minutes but, because they are interlined, a train will come every 5 minutes.

**Regional rail:** the Red Line will change from 30-minute or 1-hour intervals to 15- and 30-minute intervals. Stations will be added to better serve Q2 Stadium, the Domain and the park-and-ride. The Green Line is planned from downtown east to Colony Park and maybe eventually Elgin.

**MetroRapid buses** have higher capacity and run at 10- to 15-minute intervals, more frequently than blue buses. Several new lines are in the works; Gold Line public meetings will be held later this year. **The Gold Line will go from the Highland station down Airport Blvd. to Clarkson, Hancock Center (likely stopping where the 10 does now), St. David’s, UT East, Dell Medical School, Capitol East, Trinity/8<sup>th</sup>, and Convention Center, Republic Square.**

**Timeline:** Now is the very important preliminary phase for the Orange and Blue Lines. This summer, we are locking down station locations; whether the lines go above or below ground in some areas, and what right-of-way (ROW) we need. **There are public meetings coming up: <https://capmetro.org/get-involved>.**

**-You can provide comments online (same link) until the end of August.**

**-After that we still have to decide how things look: trees, station amenities, sidewalk, bike lines, etc. We start building in 2025 and it will take 5 years.**

**-MetroRapid bus timelines are much faster. By 2024 we should have the Gold Line MetroRapid bus.**

**-There are also working groups that focus on specific sections of one line, and you can genuinely influence the thinking of the design teams. To learn more, click the blue button under “We need your input!” <https://capmetro.org/get-involved>**

Robyn: **People’s first question is how the streets around Hancock will change.**

Lonny: Right now there are 15-minute buses on 38<sup>th</sup>, Duval and Red River, and a 30-minute bus on 45<sup>th</sup>.

**-The short-term changes will be MetroRapid stations on Red River, Airport and maybe 45<sup>th</sup>. These stations will probably look different than the existing stations because of upgrades.**

**-If there are places you think there should be station between UT and Hancock Center, you should come to the Gold Line meetings later this year and request them.**

**-If/when we start planning rail, there will be many public meetings to discuss topics including right-of-way impacts. At this point in the process it’s very hard to answer questions about how many travel lanes a potential train would take, or impacts on ROW.**

Robyn: **How are transit plans being shaped by Covid-related changes like remote work?**

Lonny: We did see large drops in ridership, but our highest-ridership routes actually had increased demand. The main impact we saw was reduced rush-hour traffic, which helps transit

with reliability. But keep in mind that not everyone can work from home, and Austin continues to grow, which increases demand.

**Robyn: Can you talk about equity – both explaining eTODs and whether Project Connect is mainly about getting people into and out of downtown, as opposed to accommodating people in low-income parts of town?**

Lonny: Transportation is a network, and if downtown is congested it can have a cascade effect that influences traffic all around the city.

-TODs are transit oriented developments, or self-contained “communities” – with most things you need within walk, bike or bus distance.

-Equitable (the e in eTOD) = making sure it’s not a developer land grab, since presumably the station areas will become more valuable. Every entity involved in Project Connect has an interest in making sure people from all walks of life can afford to live in Austin. We don’t want the addition of stations to price out people or businesses.

-Yannis Banks, Lonny’s colleague: When people are displaced from more central areas, sometimes they move outside Capital Metro’s service area, and we are not legally able to bring service out there. But we’re increasing frequency of service where we can and looking at adding circulators where we can’t have a bus. The Community Advisory Committee is the group managing the money we got for anti-displacement, or efforts to prevent people and businesses being priced out because we add this infrastructure. Their meetings are open to the public.

Questions:

Linda Guerrero: **Will we be able to use reduced fares (for the elderly, special needs, low-income folks) on MetroRapid?**

Lonny: Yes, MetroRapid costs the same as Metro Buses: \$1.25 one-way, \$2.50 for a day pass. Cap Metro also offers the reduced-fair ID program for seniors, Medicare card holders, people with disabilities and active military, and you get these by going to the store at 9<sup>th</sup>/Lavaca. <https://capmetro.org/rfid>

Linda: **I just want to express my hope that this isn’t a bait-and-switch situation**, where you say we’re trying MetroRapid but your intention is really to put in transit, and then we get into issues of eminent domain and encroachment on the golf course.

Lonny: I register that. We really want people to participate in our meetings so all comments can become part of the official record.