

South Lamar Neighborhood Association
General Meeting Minutes
June 15, 2006

Officers Present: Nancy Maclaine, John Bissell, Don Ewalt, Kevin Lewis

The meeting was called to order by Vice-President Nancy Maclaine at 7:05pm. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves.

Speakers

- Arborist Chris Dolan from the City spoke at length on oak wilt. The City has just restaffed this position after several years. Chris handed out maps showing the extent of oak wilt infestation on our area. Basically, the area north of Ben White, west of Southridge, east of Manchaca, and south of Valleyview has fairly heavy infestation. See <http://www.southlamar.org> for a copy of the map.

Each of us can take action to help control the spread of this disease. Don't prune in the spring. Hot or cold weather periods are best for pruning. Always seal cuts immediately and clean all saws and pruning tools between trees. If you have a red oak that has died from oak wilt, contact the City immediately for assistance in disposing of the tree. The fungal mat that can grow after a red oak dies is a prime way that oak wilt is spread by beetles to live oaks. It was noted that SLNA does have an oak wilt coordinator, Charlton Perry (cperry@sstx.org or 731-6518) who can assist with a kit of fungicide and tools for application.

There are over a hundred oak wilt infestations ("centers") in the city, so Chris is kept very busy. More information is available at <http://www.texasoakwilt.org> and at <http://www.southlamar.org>.

- Ray Henning and Michele McAfee from Austin Energy discussed the City's often-controversial tree trimming program. AE must prune for safety (lines contacting trees can be hot) and reliability. AE is on a 4-5 year schedule for tree trimming around their lines. Their records show that most of our neighborhood has been trimmed within the last 2-5 years, so it may be awhile before they have to do much in our area and then that should largely be pruning rather than major cuts.

The guidelines are that trees be trimmed back at least 6-13 feet from the top-most high-voltage lines (those attached to the top of the pole) and 4-9 feet from the lower low-voltage lines. These are guidelines - many times cuts will have to be made farther back on a branch in order to ensure that proper pruning practices are followed. Some trees may need to be removed totally as there is no way to prune them properly and have the tree survive or be aesthetically pleasing. AE has a program of free trees as replacements for many of the problem trees that grow near the lines.

When it is time to trim, AE will first contact SLNA so that the neighborhood can be alerted in advance. Arborists will then inspect the lines/trees and leave a report for each affected property owner detailing the work that needs to be done.

The options available to property owners after they have been advised of AE's plan are:

- You may request an on-site meeting with a Contractor representative to review the proposed tree work
- You may request an on-site meeting with an Austin Energy employee to discuss the proposed tree work
- You may request to have a third party present during the meetings and/or during the work
- You may request modifications to the proposed tree work
- You may request to not have trees removed on your property
- You may request to be present when the tree work is performed
- You will receive a written work plan (VWP) documenting the final plan for your property
- You may request pricing on potential electric system modification to minimize or reduce tree work

Neighborhood Issues

- Don Ewalt gave the treasurer's report. We have several CDs and about \$1000 in checking. We are in good shape financially.
- This Saturday's neighborhood cleanup (6/17) will be Chad Hymel's last as Keep Austin Beautiful coordinator for SLNA. A big thanks to Chad for three years of organizing these cleanups and a big welcome/thanks to Wendy Brennan and Link Davidson who will be assuming this effort.
- National Night Out is August 1st. This year's events for the neighborhood will be sponsored by and held at the Bainbridge Villas. More information will be forthcoming as we get closer to the date.
- Kay Dorsey has agreed to re-ignite the Neighborhood Watch program which she chaired many years ago. Kay is looking for block captains, who are the key to organizing an effective program. Contact Kay at 494-5158 if you are interested.
- The construction on Walgreens is drawing to a close. The new Maria's Taco Xpress is scheduled to open by mid-July and Walgreens should be open by mid- to late September. There was a question on the status of infamous "porkchop" intended to prevent right turns on to Bluebonnet from Walgreens. At this point, it looks like the exit is built to the specs that SLNA agreed to in the restrictive covenant. It's obvious that, as designed, this abutment will not prevent right turns.
- Clawson Road is partially closed for about two more weeks due to utilities work.
- Bill Stoughton presented a brief update on Neighborhood Planning. The current activity is land use planning, culminating in a Future Land Use Map (FLUM) which will drive development decisions for the next decade. Attendance from our

neighborhood at these meetings has dropped off quite a bit and more participation is needed if we want a credible plan. An executive group has met with the City to try and move the process along and avoid the redundancy that has stymied the past few meetings. The next NP meeting is July 26th and Bill may hold some working sessions prior to that. Please get involved!!

- Kevin Lewis provided a brief update on the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC). The so-called “McMansion Ordinance” was approved by City Council on its first two readings. You can view the new regulations at http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/zoning/sf_regs.htm.
- All of the current officers are up for re-election in November. Everyone except the Secretary is constrained by term limits (two years) and cannot run again for the same office.
- Bob Thompson presented some ideas for changes to the SLNA bylaws to correct what he and others see as inequities that arose from the Foundation Communities vote. Bob’s suggestions for possible revisions in bylaws and/or policies are:
 - 1) SLNA should not take votes upon neighborhood positions on controversial issues at the first meeting at which these issues are discussed.
 - 2) SLNA should not represent a neighborhood position on controversial issues on the basis of either a small total vote or a relatively close vote. We should not be afraid to be neutral, or to state that opinions are divided and the neighborhood does not take a position.
 - 3) SLNA should loosen up our voting and membership requirements. Perhaps dues should be voluntary, and no one should be forced to plead poverty in order to vote. Perhaps voting should be allowed at the first meeting which a resident of the neighborhood attends. Perhaps we should allow extended voting in some cases.
 - 4) In regard to controversial zoning issues, we should establish some voting policy which pays deference to the more closely affected neighbors. As a neighborhood, we should support the opinions of the more closely affected neighbors, at least to the extent of giving them a greater weight. This could be done through “distance-weighted voting”, which would give closely affected neighbors a greater voice, but not a veto.

Bryan King talked about his survey of what other Austin neighborhood associations do about membership and voting. All save one have a membership fee and only members can vote. It was noted that SLNA is in pretty good shape financially and that dues were not a necessity.

Kevin Lewis opined that SLNA, unlike some other neighborhood associations, tries very hard to be inclusive and democratic rather than having an elected Board make all of the major decisions. He also pointed out that even in a democracy, the decisions rest with those who choose to show up, discuss, and vote. There will need to be more discussion on Bob’s ideas and some concrete language drafted before anything can be proposed as an amendment to the bylaws.

There was some general discussion on how to increase involvement and attendance at meetings. More social events and “fun” activities were suggested.

After a motion/second to extend the meeting past 9:00 to allow more discussion of SLNA bylaws, the meeting adjourned at 9:25pm.

- John Bissell