

Hyde Park United

MAY 2008

A S E N S E O F C O M M U N I T Y

A publication of the Hyde Park United Civic Association
P.O. Box 66422 ■ Houston, Texas 77266

www.hydeparkunited.org

President's Letter

I'd like to share with you the latest information from the Montrose Boulevard Conservancy regarding **WALKABLE MONTROSE: Re-Establishing Houston's Grand Boulevard**. Soon, I hope to have a guest speaker come to a meeting and describe the finer details of this exciting project.

Montrose Boulevard Conservancy (MBC) is a community based, civic purpose, non-profit corporation, dedicated to redevelopment/restoration of Montrose Blvd. to its original conception as a grand avenue connecting Buffalo Bayou at Allen Parkway to the Mecom Fountain at Hermann Park.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Project objectives include beautification, identity as a premier civic feature of the city, consistent, high quality maintenance, and effective and functional pedestrian circulation system.

Preliminary planning includes development of the Montrose Boulevard corridor with landscape improvements, pedestrian walkways, identity and other special features in public right of way, boulevard esplanades and back of curb public space and perhaps selected private spaces of adjacent property owners.

PROJECT MASTER PLAN IN A NUTSHELL

The "Walkable Montrose" Master plan, commissioned by MBC and prepared by White Oak Studio Landscape Architecture, provides an assessment of current deteriorated conditions and a master plan for redevelopment of Montrose Boulevard as a comprehensive pedestrian circulation system and well landscaped Boulevard. Improvements to create a safe, attractive, enjoyable pedestrian 2.7 mile corridor include:

1. Continuous walkway loop system-connecting trails of Buffalo Bayou Park at Allen Parkway with the walkways of Hermann Park, Rice University and the METRO Red Line Rice/Hermann Park Station.

2. Pedestrian crosswalks and signalization at intersections.
3. Lighting illumination of pedestrian walkways and road-

way to assure safety and security.

4. Comprehensive system of traffic and way finding signage for orientation and safety.

5. Landscaping, irrigation and maintenance of esplanades and roadway streetscape edges. Adoption of esplanades through the City of Houston's Adopt an Esplanade program, completed June 2007.

6. Identity markers at Bayou and Park connections as well as Montrose/Westheimer intersection.

Kathy Schipper, President, Hyde Park United

EDITOR'S NOTE: For more on the Montrose Boulevard Conservancy, read *The Houston Chronicle's* coverage of an April 10th meeting at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral's Martel Auditorium at ...
<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/nb/heights/news/5704010.html>
or visit <http://www.montroseblvd.org/index.html>

NEXT MEETING

Monday, May 5 at 7:15 PM
Grace Lutheran Church,
2525 Waugh Dr. @ Missouri

Agenda:

Introductions

New Business

- Approve March Minutes
- Montrose Boulevard Conservancy
- Home Tour 2009
- Tree Update

Old Business

- Traffic Study
- Lamar Park

Announcements

Adjournment

Deadline for June newsletter: Wed., May 21



May 26: Remembering and honoring
those who have died in our nation's service

MEMORIAL DAY

Read the History of Memorial Day at
<http://www.usmemorialday.org/backgrnd.html>

Ahoy! Singing, dancing lawyers set sail June 4-7

Cast includes Hyde Park United Vice President Allyson Wilkinson

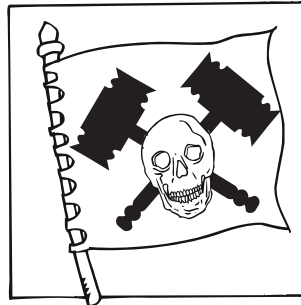
An all lawyer musical comedy with an orchestra full of lawyers? Written by lawyers? Produced by lawyers? In Houston's downtown theatre district?

Yes! And even better: the show is actually entertaining with nearly 100 of Houston's finest lawyers, judges, and elected officials volunteering hundreds of hours together to showcase incredible talent and raise money for the Houston Bar Foundation which provides legal services and related resources to the less fortunate in our community. You may even see a neighbor or two under the lights as **Martha Williams** and **Allyson Wilkinson** share the stage that is dedicated to

raising the bar on lawyer jokes — these are for charity!

Night Court 2008: Law of the Sea sets sail June 4-7 at the Wortham Center. A uniform ticket price for each performance ensures that the best tickets get purchased first. Tickets are available at <http://www.hba.org/> and can be acquired with a few quick clicks.

For people who are thinking a bigger venue will allow them to wait and *still* purchase good tickets, it might be wise to check the ticketing system for availability. Good seats are disappearing quickly. The only advantage to waiting to purchase tickets is, hmmm, well, actually there is no advantage to waiting.



Atassi, Lemus produce maps of Hyde Park for easy future reference

At the monthly civic meetings, a resident invariably raises an issue involving a specific location within the neighborhood. Unless you happen to live on the street or are familiar with the exact location, it can be very frustrating listening to the ensuing discussion.

Now, thanks to two enterprising residents, the problem is solved. Aladdin Atassi and Chris Lemus collaborated on a high-tech map project. Aladdin writes, we "had some 11"x17" tab-

loid-sized map sections printed out and laminated. The quality and resolution of these color satellite pictures are very tolerable, and should be handy in meetings in so far as they can be handed about for people to look at and get a better idea of what plot, house, or plan is being discussed."

The two cartographers have other mapping projects in the works, but for the time being, the new maps are of exceptional quality and serve a much-needed function. THANKS!



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Grace Lutheran to hold Spring Rummage Sale Saturday, May 10

Grace Lutheran is having its Spring Rummage Sale Saturday, May 10 from 8:00 a.m. until 2 p.m. The entrance to the sale will be off Van Buren as the courtyard and adjoining space will be used rather than the fellowship hall.

Last year, the proceeds from the spring and fall sales went toward the process of finding a new pastor (copies, mailings, travel and meal expenses). The congregation is still in that process as of this writing, although a vote is planned for April 27 whether or not to extend a call to one of the candidates. Also to be decided that day is where we want the proceeds of the sale to go. Suggestions include: moving expenses for the new pastor, summer camp registration for disadvantaged youth, and the back-to-school project of the Christian Community Service Center.

If you have items to donate, please bring them to the Hyde Park civic club meeting on May 5 and leave them near the stage. If you have larger items, contact Bridget Jensen (713-524-1290) to arrange pick-up.



Changes to Land Development Ordinance affect Inner Loop

[This information will be dated by the time the newsletter is distributed. However, residents are encouraged to contact their Councilmembers (Wanda Adams and Sue Lovell) and urge them to vote against the proposed changes to state law. — Kathy Schipper]

Houston Planning Commission is considering significant amendments to Houston's land development ordinance governing replats and average lot size in existing subdivisions inside Loop 610. These changes will impact homeowners in older neighborhoods, such as Houston Heights and most of the City's designated historic districts, where protective covenants and deed restrictions are no longer in effect. The amendments are of particular concern in neighborhoods that do not have prevailing/minimum setback and lot size provisions.

The amendment regarding replats is mandated by a new state law, H.B. 1067, which was enacted in late 2007. The law applies only to neighborhoods within the City of Houston inside Loop 610 and nowhere else in Texas. The state law eliminates key controls Houston Planning Commission had exercised over developers replatting lots in existing subdivisions.

Under the new law, Planning Commission can only enforce covenants and restrictions that are included in recorded deeds or deed restrictions. Many covenants, such as building line, lot size and use (i.e. single-family or multi-family), are frequently included only on the original subdivision plats and not in deeds or deed restrictions.

State law now forbids Houston Planning Commission from applying restrictions on the original plats to replatted lots, but only in Houston neighborhoods located inside Loop 610.

The second proposed amendment is not required by the new state law. This amendment would establish a 15-foot minimum width for lots inside Loop 610 in neighborhoods that do not have protective covenants or restrictions. The City's current minimum lot width is 20 feet. The proposed 15-foot lots would be allowed in subdivisions where the average width of all lots is at least 20 feet. The average size of all lots in the subdivision must be at least 1400 square feet.

According to the Planning Commissions summary, this amendment will allow for diverse housing choices within the Urban Area (Loop 610) by allowing a greater mix of lot size in a platted subdivision. With state law prohibiting the City from enforcing covenants on the original plat, the new narrower lot width will only encourage one housing choice townhomes.

Although the Planning Department asserts these amendments do not change, alter or affect any of the special/minimum lot size and building line provisions of Chapter 42, most Inner Loop neighborhoods are not protected by these provisions. The action that brought about the amendments raises serious concerns about the ultimate impact on Inner Loop neighborhoods.

— Continued on page 8



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Ideas sought on solving possum problem

My husband and I distribute the newsletters. We have a problem, and wondered if our neighbors had suggestions for solving it.

We recently spotted a very large possum on our property fence. It appeared to be pregnant. I even took its picture, believing that a residential street in the heart of the city would be a unique place for such an animal. A few days later, we saw either the same one, who had already given birth, or a smaller relative. Then, again, I spotted one on our front porch, but it was dark and I never determined where it went.

Lately, our dog has stopped to sniff around the front steps. My husband saw a baby possum that disappeared before I could come out to take a look. Search-



ing around, he found a hole under our house and then a larger one under the porch. They have an entrance and an exit.

We want to be rid of these “neighbors.” Has anyone else in the area had a similar situation? We would appreciate any solutions that will take care of it, short of causing them to die under the house. I would call them varmints, lacking other words for these intruders.

Hoping to hear from those in Hyde Park United with an answer to our problem.

Brenda Neal
713-533-1451
smamucho2@yahoo.com

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Membership Committee revived, volunteers sought

Every time HPU officers read the bylaws, we discover something else we should be doing — which is a very good reason NOT to read the bylaws! One item, the MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE is conspicuously missing.

HPU had an active Membership Committee in times past, however, it lapsed when members assumed other roles in the civic association or moved to other parts of the country. The ultimate goal of a membership committee is pretty obvious — to increase membership. However, the bylaws do not specify HOW this is to be done. This is where creativity and sociability comes into play.

Resident **Kathy Herring** has volunteered to serve on the committee and assist whomever is in charge. Because there are no rules, you can invent the job as you see fit. Whatever you decide, the resources and goodwill of the association are behind you!

If interested, please contact Kathy Schipper at president@hydeparkunited.org

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Hyde Park United Civic Association Meeting Minutes: April 7, 2008

INTRODUCTION AND OFFICER REPORTS

The April 2008 meeting of the Hyde Park United (HPU) Civic Association was held at Grace Lutheran Church on Monday, April 7.

Kathy Herring raised a question about who is responsible for cleaning the bike trails, and **Kathy Schipper** responded that the City of Houston was responsible.

OLD BUSINESS

Neighborhood Traffic Study

Kathy Schipper reported that she has received 75 responses to her survey of acute traffic problems in Hyde Park. The group briefly discussed why the intersection of Waugh Dr. and Missouri, near the Grace Lutheran Church, is a dangerous intersection for pedestrians. (Waugh Dr. bends, and cars come upon you very fast at a certain spot.) **Kathy** plans to complete her compilation of information for the traffic study application this week. She noted that there is some type of traffic-related problem on every street in the HPU neighborhood. "We're all having problems," she said.

Home Tour

The **HPU Home Tour Committee** is requesting representative houses to participate in the 2009 home tour. The committee also would like to recruit more volunteers to plan the event. (**Allyson Wilkinson** is chairing this committee.) The group talked briefly about coordinating with Grace Lutheran Church before choosing a date for the tour. **Allyson** said it was important that we have more than one architectural style represented on the tour. She acknowledged that many Hyde Park residents seem interested in the upcoming tour. **Kathy** reported having three houses confirmed so far.

The 2009 Home Tour will incorporate the **Art Crawl**, which will be held inside the Grace Lutheran Church. The Art Crawl will serve as the tour's starting point. Artists will have the opportunity to set up individual areas featuring art for sale. Only artists whose houses are on the Home Tour will be allowed to set up studios inside the Art Crawl.

Fall Tree Planting

In past years the City of Houston has planted 500 trees in Hyde Park as part of a Montrose-wide planting. **Kathy** is trying to get more hardwood trees from **Victor Cordova**, who directs the City of Houston Department of Urban Forestry. In order for Hyde Park to qualify for another planting this fall, residents have

to plant the new trees on City property or on a right-of-way. Residents can take advantage of this offer by agreeing to plant a tree on the City right-of-way or easement on their property. (Generally, the easement is the area between the sidewalk and the street.) To take advantage of this program HPU residents have to maintain the trees. **Kathy** advised residents to start thinking about whether they would like a hardwood tree in front of their house, on the easement.

HPU Tree Give-Away

Before HPU united two former civic associations, the two civic groups regularly collected money to plant new trees. In the past, the neighborhood used this money to plant a lot of crepe myrtles. Currently, HPU has about \$750 in the tree fund that is being unused, **Kathy** noted. She suggested that perhaps in the fall, the association might consider a raffle of hardwood trees for residents who could use them. This way, the tree fund would be put to good use and honor the spirit of those who donated to it.

Bill Pesota asked if there were restrictions placed on the tree fund. Specifically, he asked, since our deed restrictions cover the protection of trees, wouldn't it be possible to use the tree fund to enforce the deed restrictions, and thereby prevent people from chopping down trees? Those present at the meeting agreed this was possible. One person suggested that we might draw attention to tree violations by getting the media to publicize the incident.

A motion was entertained to place the money in the Tree Fund into the Neighborhood Protection Fund. The motion was seconded; a vote was taken, and the motion carried.

In turn, another motion was entertained to earmark money in the **Neighborhood Protection Fund** for the enforcement of deed restrictions, specifically for protecting trees. There was more discussion about how easy or hard it would be to keep track of this portion of the Neighborhood Protection Fund. Subsequently, the group discussed the need to record which trees in Hyde Park are big enough to be protected. **George Sroka** mentioned that he had gathered physical details about a tree recently destroyed on the Willard St. lot near Waugh Dr. where construction is going on. **Dan Schnorr** suggested that we use part of the Neighborhood Protection Fund to pay an arborist to verify the dimensions of trees that have been cut down.

Kathy reiterated that we can certainly

dedicate the Neighborhood Protection Fund to hire an arborist, or to pay legal fees related to the protection of trees.

Lamar Park

Jean Garwood, chairman of the Lamar Park Committee, reported that the funds that help HPU maintain **Lamar Park** have not changed. (Currently the Houston Parks Board capital improvement fund for the park has an unencumbered balance of \$6,463.12.) There was not much else new to report, related to Lamar Park. The irrigation system is working well. The weeds in the park are being kept "reasonably under control," **Jean** said.

HPU Newsletter

Tom Greer asked about those responsible for distributing the monthly HPU newsletter. **Kathy** explained that **Bill and Brenda Neal**, who live on Jackson, are volunteering to bundle the newsletters, and will do so for about two more months.

NEW BUSINESS

Kathy asked if anyone present might volunteer to speak at the upcoming City Planning Commission hearing related to designating a minimum lot size for both sides of the 1100 block of Jackson St., filed by resident/ applicant **Andy Blanchard**. Several months earlier, **Andy** applied for the minimum lot size designation on both sides of the block in question, after gathering signatures from 51 percent of the Jackson St. property owners (mostly from one side of the block). Several of those present asked about the length of the upcoming hearing, scheduled for the following Thursday (April 10). **Kathy** also explained that an earlier hearing on **Andy's** application was deferred to investigate residential support for the application. At that meeting several council members raised questions about residential support for the designation.

Announcements

Kathy announced that the **Montrose Boulevard Conservancy** is interested in renovating esplanades on Montrose Blvd. The Conservancy met at the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Catholic Church on Thursday, April 10, at 3511 Yoakum, in the Martel Auditorium, from 6 to 8 p.m.

There was a motion to adjourn the April meeting, followed by a second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by Cynthia Greenwood, Secretary

ARTS CALENDAR

Submit news to artscalendar@hydeparkunited.org


Origami demo May 3 at Path of Tea

Join Hyde Park origami artist Marguerite Belkin 1-3:30 May 3, for an origami jewelry trunk show and sale at Path of Tea, 2340 West Alabama. Marguerite will be demonstrating Origami during the event, which benefits the Parkinson Society. Origami Lady Jewelry, Path of Tea, and Lucia's Garden will be donating their profits that day.

Garbage Collection, Recycling Schedule

Garbage & Yard Trimming Collection: Every Monday (except holidays). **Recycling Pickup:** Every other Tuesday. **Heavy Trash Pickup:** Second Tuesdays. **May 13 and June 10**

Check the city's trash pickup and recycling schedule online at: <http://www.houstontx.gov/solidwaste/77006.html>



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Monday—Friday
Lunch Specials: 11 a.m.— 2:30 p.m.
Dinner 5:00 p.m. — 9:30 p.m.

Saturday
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Sunday
12:00 Noon — 9:30 p.m.

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| Commonwealth Apts. | Libby Cook | 713-522-0584 |
| Fairview/Van Buren | Tom Greer | 713-526-9149 |
| Hyde Park & Hyde Park Apts. | Linda Carter | 713-524-2952 |
| Hyde Park Crescent | Carlos Fernandez | 713-520-7017 |
| Hyde Park Townhomes | Jean Garwood | 713-807-1228 |
| NEW! Indiana/Yupon | Brigette Wignall | 281-788-8011 |
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| Michigan | Tom Whitworth | 713-523-8035 |
| Missouri | Jeanne Wallace | 713-528-0834 |
| Montrose | Sara Fernandez | 713-520-7017 |
| Peden/Haddon/Van Buren | Randy Stadler | 713-524-2756 |
| Vermont | Peter Forbes | 713-527-0948 |
| Waugh | Sue Chin | 713-522-3231 |
| Welch | Scott Whitley | 713-545-1497 |
| West Drew | Alice McCarthy | 713-521-5807 |
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Hyde Park MAY 2008 Yard of the Month

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1314 Peden St., & 1228 Bomar

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Help us honor the efforts of those working to keep Hyde Park beautiful.



HELP MAKE HYDE PARK EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL *Donate materials or money for neighborhood art projects. E-mail Beautification Committee Chair Christopher Kyle McClain at beautification@hydeparkunited.org*

Land Development Ordinance — Continued from page 3

A summary of the amendments is available on the Planning & Development Department Web site. Scroll down the Planning Department home page to find the link.

Concerns

Deed restrictions have expired in many of Houston's Inner Loop neighborhoods, including most of the City's designated historic districts. Most of these neighborhoods do not have special/minimum lot size and building line provisions. GHPA is concerned about the potential for incompatible development in these neighborhoods if lots are replatted without maintaining the existing building line or enforcing lot size and use restrictions. Lots that are 15-foot wide would compound the problem.

Action

Homeowners in the Inner Loop neighborhoods affected by these amendments should express their concerns during the public hearing before the Houston Planning Commission, 2:30 p.m., Thursday, April 24, City Hall Annex Chambers, 900 Bagby [map]. If it is not possible to attend the public hearing, please contact your Houston City Council district and at-large members.

Under state law there are now only two ways to protect your Inner Loop neighborhood:

- 1) Make sure your subdivisions deed restrictions are recorded with Harris County, and that deed restrictions are active and enforced.
- 2) Petition the City to establish special/minimum lot size and building line provisions under Chapter 42. GHPA's Historic Neighborhoods Council can advise homeowners in the necessary procedures. Please contact Courtney Tardy at cktardy@ghpa.org.

H.B. 1067 Background

In 2006, Houston Planning Commission began requiring developers who replat lots in existing subdivisions to maintain the existing

building line on the replatted lots, an important factor in maintaining neighborhood character. In 2007, State Rep. Jim Murphy authored and Sen. Kyle Janek sponsored Texas House Bill 1067. According to the Texas Legislatures bill analysis, the purpose of the bill was to stop the Houston Planning Commission from imposing the building line requirement because it restricts redevelopment. The law applies only to neighborhoods within the City of Houston inside Loop 610. The measure does not apply to neighborhoods in either Rep. Murphy's or Sen. Janek's districts. The Inner Loop cities of Bellaire, West University Place and Southside Place, which Sen. Janek represents, are exempt from the law.

Although the bills stated purpose was to stop the Houston Planning Commission from imposing building line requirements when lots are replatted, the laws language is much broader. The state law specifies that covenants and restrictions can only be enforced if they are contained in recorded deeds or deed restrictions. Many covenants, such as minimum lot size and use restrictions (i.e., single family or multi-family designations), are frequently noted on a subdivisions original plat, but not included in the deed or deed restrictions. Texas law now states that restrictions noted on original plats cannot be applied to replatted lots, but only in Houston inside Loop 610 and nowhere else in Texas.

In addition, the City of Houston previously required property owners within a subdivision to approve changes to building line or use restrictions for replats. State law now allows the owner of a single property to change those restrictions after a public hearing before the Planning Commission.

According to the House Land Use & Resource Management Committee report, the only witnesses appearing before the committee considering the bill were lobbyists for the Greater Houston Builders Association and Texas Association of Builders. Both organizations supported the measure.

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