

North Montrose Civic Association

Update May 2004

** Upcoming Meeting: Tuesday May 11th 7 pm.

JOIN US Tuesday May 11th at 7 pm for our monthly meeting. Jack Rose, President of the Neartown Neighborhood Civic Association, is going to be our speaker. There is also a potluck dinner in the beginning of the meeting. **BRING YOUR FAVORITE DISH!**

Recap of the April Meeting

Gary Schatz, Chief Engineer of the City's Traffic Management branch was the guest speaker at last month's NMCA meeting. He spoke about the different types of traffic management programs the City has implemented in order to mitigate traffic on neighborhood streets. The NMCA also voted to make a contribution of \$250 to the memorial fund of Officer Frank Cantu who was killed in the line of duty at the corner of West Gray and Dunlavy in March.

Welcome New Members!

We have 5 new members who joined us in the month of April:

JC Bartholow

Lina's Cleaning Service

Lloyd and Marlene Matzner

Marie Coppola

Jason Liddell and Mary Pope

What's going on in the neighborhood?! W. Gray Sewer Replacement Project Update By John Galeener

North Montrose Civic Association sponsored a Public Meeting on April 27th at the Wharton Elementary School to discuss the West Gray Sewer

Replacement Project. By all reports, this meeting was a success! Approximately one-half of the affected property owners were present, and the meeting was conducted in a casual, open style.

Our City Council Member, Ms. Ada Edwards, opened the meeting with the announcement that this project is the first time that the City has agreed to include the plumbing work necessary to reconnect sewer lines including the portion on private property. In order for the project to proceed, all property owners will be required to sign a "Right of Entry" form that gives the City permission to contract for work on private property. As was explained later, the City will hold the selected Contractor responsible for repairing and replacing all damage, with the standard of condition to be "as good or better" than before the work.

After Ms. Edwards' remarks, Mr. Dan Krueger (Deputy Director of the City's Public Works Department) and Mr. Ed Conger (Project Manager of the project for CLR, the consulting engineering firm doing the design of the project for the City) described the project.

As published before in these pages, the project area is bounded by Marconi Street on the East and Waugh Drive on the West, and affects the properties on West Gray, West Pierce, West Bell and West Clay streets.

While the existing sanitary sewers are behind the properties, the Public Works Department has developed a plan to relocate the sewer to the street right of way. When completed, the sewer will run down the center of West Gray, West Pierce, West Bell and West Clay, and a gathering line will be constructed along the center of Hazel Street from Peden Street to West Clay to move the sewage out of the area.

Currently the project is in the design stage. The Public Works Department expects that the City Council will consider and appropriate construction money for this project during the summer of 2004, with construction beginning shortly after that. Construction is expected to proceed in phases, with each phase taking approximately three months. The total project should be complete by summer of 2005.

Streets in the area will not be rebuilt by this project. However, West Gray will be completely resurfaced from Montrose to Waugh Drive, and the side of the neighborhood streets damaged by the trenching necessary to install the new sewers will be repaired and resurfaced. In addition, curbing and driveways on the side of the street with the new sewer will be repaired or replaced as necessary.

The City will require the contractor to keep access to every driveway along the streets open except for short periods during the time the street is dug up. Because the contractor will have an open trench down one side of the street, however, access will be limited to one-way traffic for the time each block is under construction.

Each affected property owners will be consulted twice about the specific routing of the necessary connection from their properties to the new sewer. The first consultation will be with the design firm and is expected to result in the general routing of the connection and the signature and filing of the Right of Entry Form. This consultation will take place during the next few weeks, before the contract is awarded to the firm that will do the actual construction. Then, during construction, there will be a second consultation with the plumber that will actually do the reconnection. Property owners will be contacted approximately two weeks before the plumber plans to work on their property. Routing will be finalized, and the plumber will make arrangements to gain access to the property to actually do the work.

So far the City has only received ¼ of the required forms from the affected homeowners.

Audience General Questions

Q: With this new approach, will the restrictions on building within 5 feet of property backlines ("prescriptive easement") be eliminated?

A: This question is being referred to the City Planning Department. A response will be published in the North Montrose Civic Association Newsletter.

Q: By signing the Right of Entry will this mean that contractors for the City can enter my property at any time for a year? What about the impact on my pets who may be kept outdoors?

A: The contractors will not take responsibility for pets. They will be on private property to put in new service lines and to carry out the abandonment process. The contract the City will sign will require that there be a general notification of all owners of property within 200 feet of start of work in an area, no sooner than later than 14 days and no sooner than 3 days of start. There will also be two additional notifications of work requiring access to a specific property (again at the 14 day and 3 day times).

Q: Besides landscaping restoration, will the contract require "hardscape" replacement, i.e. fences, concrete, etc. that may be damaged by the contractor?

A: Yes, the standard to which the contractor will be held is that the property be left in as good or better shape than it was before start of work.

Q: What is my recourse if the contractor doesn't do the job or doesn't do it right?

A: The City Inspector is charged with making sure that the contractor does the work and does it properly. In addition, there is a 5% "holdback" on payments to a contractor as a performance assurance. This is not paid until proper work completion is certified.

Q: Will private property be disturbed to do the abandonment process?

A: This wouldn't be typical but it may happen if, for example, there is a manhole on private property.

Audience questions continued...

Q: How will we know where the sewer connections are and whether the contractor takes cognizance of the homeowner's preferences?

A: A licensed plumber will do the work and will work with the homeowner on the very specific details of routing. There will be a revised sketch for planning and a further opportunity to revise. The plumber will need that to get a permit to do the plumbing work.

Q: How soon will we need to sign the Right of Entry?

A: The City would like the Right of Entry as soon as possible, although it is recognized that not everyone will be prepared to do this at the public session. This will enable the City to proceed timely in the bid/ award process.

Q: How long will the trenching process take?

A: This will normally be a matter of a day or two.

Q: Shouldn't we take pictures of the before condition to help ensure replacement to standards?

A: This is a good idea and is encouraged.

Q: What is involved in abandonment?

A: The City will fill the line with coarse aggregate concrete to prevent collapse.

Q: Will there be a criminal background check required of all employees of the selected contractor?

A: No. The City will require that the selected contractor be insured and bonded. Contractor employees will not have to enter private homes to accomplish the contracted tasks. This has not proven to be a problem with the many contracts the City awards to construction.

Q: How can we sign the Right of Entry form if we are unsure of the routing?

A: The City recognizes that not everyone is prepared to sign as of the meeting but does desire to work with property owners on an "as soon as possible" basis so that work can proceed and the problem addressed.

Q: Why can't the City take responsibility for damages caused by the contractor?

A: This is a City Charter issue and not a bureaucratic one. The City Attorney does not have the right to waive City rights of indemnification in these circumstances. This is not unique to Houston. That being said, the City does intend to work with property owners to ensure a good outcome.

Q: Will the City coordinate with utilities to make sure that other utility functions like water service are not disrupted?

A: Yes. If there is unintended damage, the contractor will be required to fix the problem.

Q: Is the need to address the sewage system caused by capacity stress from the numbers of townhouses and multi-family dwellings that have been built recently in the area?

A: No. The basic sewer system is very old and had deteriorated to the point where it is no longer functioning properly. In places it is simply a "holding tank" until there can be daily pumping around problems. The new system will be adequate to handle the volumes of waste water anticipated.

Q: What happens if we sign the Right of Entry now, but sell the property before the work is done?

A: This could not be answered by those present at the meeting.

Q: Will there be an overnight period when the sewer system doesn't work in any particular home?

A: No.

Q: Will the technique be trenching or tunneling?

A: On West Gray the expectation is there will be tunneling. On other streets there will be trenching.

Q: Will it be possible to have a "double connection" with my property and another?

A: Generally, no. However, there may be specific circumstances in which the service lines are gathered together before connecting to the City line in the street.

Heavy Trash

By Allen Ueckert

Once a month, residents can dispose of large bulky items such as furniture and appliances through the heavy trash pickup service. Heavy trash includes white goods such as refrigerators, washing machines and dishwashers (freon must be taken out of appliances), old furniture, mattresses and wood waste such as large tree branches.

Residents are encouraged to separate the recyclable wood waste from the non-recyclable heavy trash. On the day of heavy trash pick-up, citizens should place materials adjacent to the front curb in a location easily accessible to the collection vehicle.

Below is the Heavy Trash Pick-up schedule for NMCA:

Heavy Trash Pick-up Schedule	
1st Thursday	West of Taft; East of Montrose
3rd Tuesday	West of Montrose; East of Waugh
4th Tuesday	West of Waugh; East of Shepard

Heavy Trash Facts:

- Heavy trash should be placed adjacent to the front curb in a location easily accessible to the collection vehicle between the hours of 6:00 p.m. the Friday before, and 7:00 am. on the scheduled collection day.
- Heavy trash material should not be stacked under low overhead electrical wires or other cabling, signs, or mailboxes; next to fences or posts; or on top of water meters, gas meters, fire hydrants, or other exposed utility components.
- Materials should not be placed in the street, on the sidewalk, or other right-of-way, or in any manner which would interfere with pedestrian or vehicular traffic.

- Heavy trash collection is limited to residential units and vacant residential lots only if the waste generated is in connection with the maintenance of the property.

Please be aware that it is a violation of city code to place heavy trash items out before the designated time period. Placing heavy trash on the curb before the designated time period does not only contribute to neighborhood blight, but also can attract rodents and other unwanted animals. Please remind your neighbors! To the extent there is a consistent problem with neighbors placing heavy trash on the curb before the scheduled pick-up, you can contact the City through the 311 help line to report the violation.

PROPOSITION 1:

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE MAY 15th!!!

Shortly after taking office, the new mayor Bill White ordered an independent analysis of the Houston Municipal Employees Pension System (HMEPS) fund, one of the city's three main pension funds. That analysis showed that the fund's future obligations may exceed its assets - by a substantial amount - over \$1 billion.

In a separate development, an amendment to the Texas Constitution, approved by voters last September, restricts local authority to reach agreements with employees and retirees over pension funds. This means that currently the mayor has no authority to negotiate a solution that could possibly prevent the current HMEPS fund from draining our city's budget. However, we have one more opportunity to act. Our City Council voted unanimously to give Houston voters the final say and called a Special Election for Proposition 1 on Saturday, May 15th.

Early voting begins Wednesday, April 28th.

Please visit the web site at www.KeepHoustonStrong.com for more information on Proposition 1.

Tomato recipe in honor of our great tomatoes in the Community Garden

By Betty Anderson

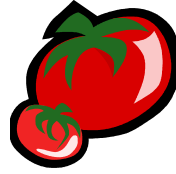
Cool Gazpacho

3 cups diced tomatoes
1 cup diced peeled and seeded cucumber
1 cup diced green bell pepper
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons chopped onion
1/3 cup sliced black olives
1 cup canned vegetable juice, like v-8
1 teaspoon chili powder
3/4 teaspoon dried oregano
3-4 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 1/2 teaspoons crushed fresh garlic
1 teaspoon sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt

Toppings: 1/2 cup nonfat sour cream (opt)
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoons ready-made fat free or low fat croutons

1. Place all of the vegetables and the olives in a large bowl. Stir to mix, and set aside.
2. Place the vegetable juice, vinegar, and seasonings in a medium-sized bowl, and stir to mix well. Pour the vegetable juice mixture over the vegetables, and toss to mix.
3. Transfer the vegetable mixture to a blender or food processor, and working in batches as necessary, process for a few seconds, or just until the vegetables are finely chopped. Transfer the soup to a covered container, and chill for 2 to 6 hours.
4. When ready to serve, place 1 cup of the gazpacho in each of 5 serving bowls. Top each serving with a rounded tablespoon of the sour cream and 2 tablespoons of the croutons if desired, and serve immediately.

Recipe from *Secrets of Cooking for Long Life*
by Sandra Woodruff, RD.



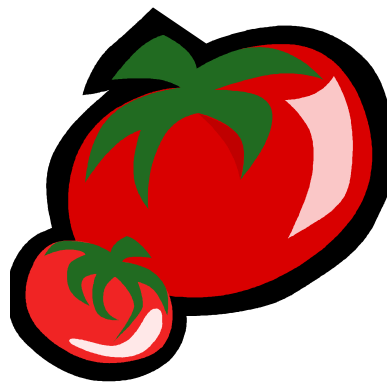
Tomatoes, tomatoes, tomatoes...

By Scott Howard

The NMCA Community Garden at 1916 W. Clay is going gangbusters. The 25 tomato plants are all producing extremely well due to the ample rain and cool evenings. The first fruit is starting to blush and will be ready to pick very soon. The yellow squash, zucchini and cucumbers are flowering with some early production. The peppers and eggplants are growing well but waiting for a little warmer weather to take off. Soon we'll start planting beans and okra and other hot weather plants.

The garden is primarily a "donation garden" and one of the prime recipients recommended is Manna House Food Pantry in 3rd Ward. This is an international organization helping the homeless with a local chapter.

Volunteers come out every Sat morning around 9am. For more info call Scott Howard at 713-524-1290.



Yard of the month:

By Julie Wilsford



Congratulations to May's winners Carolyn and Matthew at 1938 W. Lamar. We hear that Carolyn's been hard at work in making the yard look so beautiful.

If you'd like to nominate your neighbor for NMCA's Yard of the Month, please contact Julie Wilsford at 713-520-6433

North Montrose Civic Association 2004 Officers and Board Members

Officers

President: Allen Ueckert 713-522-1776
Vice Pres: John Galeener 832-453-2656
Treasurer: Gus Elizondo 713-522-2468
Secretary: Susanna Evens 713-528-8601

Board Members

Scott Howard 713-524-1290
Betty Anderson 713-527-8961
Bridget Jensen 713-524-1290
Lance Jones 713-522-1776
Russ Lebovitz 713-524-1121
Julie Wilsford 713-520-6433
Margaret Young 713-521-5982

Have an article you'd like to have included in the next NMCA newsletter? Please email Susanna, the NMCA secretary, at the following email address:

psevens@sbcglobal.net

Police Beat

It looks like the bad guys mostly stayed away from North Montrose in March 2004..

From HPD Crime Bulletin 03/01/04 to 03/31/04
The following crimes were listed in the North Montrose Area:

Robbery	1
Burglary	4
Burglary of a vehicle	3
Auto Theft	2
Narcotics	4
DWI	1



Attention Business Owners!!!

Want to include your ad in our newsletter? Membership to businesses is very affordable, at only \$36 a year. If you're interested in advertising and membership, please contact our President Allen Ueckert at 713-522-1776.

**City Traffic Management Speaker Addresses
NM Civic Association**

By Carol Galeener

Gary Schatz, Chief Engineer of Houston's Traffic and Transportation Division, spoke to residents at the April North Montrose Civic Association meeting. Mr. Schatz detailed how communities can influence traffic patterns and reduce traffic-related problems in their neighborhoods. Two key programs are the Speed Hump Program and Neighborhood Traffic Project Programs.

Speed Hump is a policy-based program that is driven by a request from the affected community. Eligibility requirements that favor the request include a high percentage of cars that speed through the neighborhood and relatively low volumes of traffic. The City objectively measures against these criteria and places on the eligible list those that pass. Unfortunately, only a fraction of eligible requests can be funded in any year. Since inception of the Speed Hump Program there has been a continuing excess of eligible traffic segments over those that can be funded in any year. In selecting which projects move forward, priority is given to those requests that: demonstrate neighborhood support; are in high accident and high speeding areas; are near schools or parks; or lack sidewalks.

**Neighborhood Calendar
May 2004**

8-May	1pm	Art Car Parade; Allen Pkwy @ Taft
8-May	3:30pm	Bayou Beckons - Anything That Floats Parade; Sabine Bridge @ Allen Pkwy
11-May	7pm	NMCA Meeting; Museum of Printing History
15-May		Proposition 1 Vote
19-May	7pm	PIP Meeting; 1475 W. Gray
25-May	7pm	Neartown Meeting; Cherryhurst Community Center

Mr. Schatz also addressed Neighborhood Traffic Management projects - relocating traffic from residential areas to major streets and thoroughfares by design of traffic patterns. Several examples of creative approaches to mitigating traffic problems were discussed. Mr. Schatz noted that since these projects often result in some inconvenience to residents, the greatest challenge is obtaining community consensus.

Welcome to our new business member!!!



**LINA'S
CLEANING
SERVICE**

(713) 528-2791

REFERENCES REASONABLE RATES SINCE 1989
BLOCK CAPTAIN, HYDE PARK UNITED C.A.
832-282-5462 (LINA)

If you would like to include an event in an upcoming newsletter, please contact a NMCA board member or officer.

North Montrose Civic Association
P.O. Box 130184
Houston, TX 77219

The North Montrose Civic Association was formed over 25 years ago to promote civic affairs in the neighborhood. NMCA is a non-profit organization that depends on voluntary membership and participation. Included in this UPDATE Newsletter is a form for residents to use to join or renew their membership. NMCA meets every month at the Museum of Printing History at 1324 W. Clay to present programs of interest to the local residents. The membership dues are very reasonable and will help defray the organization's costs to produce and distribute the Newsletter, to sponsor social events such as National Night Out and the Holiday Dinner and to organize and complete various neighborhood projects. Please join NMCA and just as important, become an active resident. See you at the February 2004 meeting.

North Montrose Civic Association
Membership Form

Mail to P.O. Box 130184, Houston, TX 77219

_____ New Member _____ Renewal

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

E-Mail: _____

DATE: _____

CHECK ONE: Owner Resident, _____ Tenant Resident,
_____ Business _____
_____ Non-resident Property Owner

Annual Membership Dues

Individual Member -- \$15
Household -- \$20
Senior Citizen Individual -- \$6, Senior Citizen Household -- \$9
Business -- \$36 Non-Resident Property Owner -- \$24