

Newsletter

The Alamo Sierran e-Newsletter - February, 2013

* GENERAL MEETINGS *

Tuesday, March 19th: New Carsharing System - Efficient, Flexible

Bill Barker of the City of San Antonio's Office of Sustainability will give an overview of the new, downtown carsharing system operated by Hertz On Demand. The recent background, expected impacts and current status of this system will be presented. Bill will provide the sustainability argument for this transportation option and show how carsharing is compatible with the significant shift in demographics and technology now taking place. Attendees will be given specific information on how to enroll and use the carshare system.

Tuesday, April 16th: Local Micro-Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles

Gary Krysztopik, through his venture ZWheelz, LLC in San Antonio, is in the process of developing very simple Open Source Electric Vehicle (EV) kits that are easy to manufacture and easy to assemble. The first vehicle is a two-seat, highway-capable, battery-electric vehicle. This project is also about creating a network of local micro manufacturers of EV's, and a global open source design community.

Times, location and speaker bios are on our Events page.

A Word from the Alamo Group Chair

Finally, we debut here our first online only newsletter. This allows the Alamo Group to save resources—like paper, postage, time mailing, and transport. We now have more space and resources for news and other important needs. Our idea is to expand our communications and education with better developed online information and links on issues to keep you and the public informed. If you would like to submit an article of your own or come across information about any local environmental development, please forward them by email to our editor, Loyd, and webmaster, Richard, so they can be considered for our newsletter and website conservation pages, and for possible distribution to others.

Margaret (Peggy) Day

Waste Management Update

Unfortunately, for some time the Alamo Group has not had anyone on our Conservation Committee informed and active on waste issues, and our Recycling Sub Committee has been dormant. So it has been hard to engage with waste management issues. This is a problem since the goals and so many programs—multifamily and organics recycling, plastic bag reduction—and future zero waste plans, such as Pay As You Throw, or PAYT—are in flux and under attack. San Antonio's Solid Waste Management Division (SWMD) does not provide regular online reports of its programs, which makes it a chore to keep tabs. They require we fill out freedom of information requests to get answers instead of just posting regular updates on the progress and problems of its plans, projects and programs, as more transparent agencies do. Surely SWMD has these reports for its top administration and city leaders. Instead they only post upbeat public relations pieces. After poring over my files, news reports, and some city files, it seems that there are many gaps in the information needed to assess program progress, but here is an update.

Multifamily recycling

A SWMD public relations release (see "Countdown" link) claims the multifamily recycling is fully implemented, but SWMD offers no information online on the levels of site or tenant participation or the percent of waste recycled. The Alamo Sierra Club has received complaints from apartment dwellers that still do not have recycling. According to Jim Johnson at *Waste Recycling News* (see link), the larger multifamily properties had a 97% to 100% compliance rate—100% of the 118 sites with 300 or more units, 98% of the 215 sites with 200 to 299 units, and 97% of the 220 sites with 100 to 199 apartments are compliant. However, by the compliance deadline only 16% of the 826 properties with fewer than 100 units were compliant. Part of the reason is San Antonio only assigned one staff to manage the program, although the office reportedly later begun to assign others lend a hand with the smaller sites. The City's budget for educational outreach for the multifamily residential recycling effort was \$250,000.

Plastic Bag Reduction

The 18 month plastic bag reduction program, called Change is in the Bag, ended last December. The City and SWMD have never made reports available to the public on their websites—perhaps because it was a weak plan and had little effect. A report in *Plaza de Armas*, by Elaine Wolff (see link) characterized the results as "disappointing." Recycling of plastic film products was up, but plastic bag distribution was up too. So it is clear there was no reduction of plastic bag use overall, just more if it was recycled. I have been monitoring and testing the situation at the participating retailers before, during and after, and there was never a significant change in the retailers—they continue to maintain a culture of plastic bag dependence. What is more disappointing is that the city invested a lot of resources, including at least \$250,000, promoting the plan and did not have, and still has, no follow-up plans.

Organics Recycling

The organics recycling pilot program, which just ended, included 30,000 residential customers, offered an opt in, three-dollar per month fee for a green 92 or 48 gallon cart for organic waste. SWMD claims the program was well regarded by the participants. The material was collected, and sent to a local company, New Earth, for composting and sale. Unfortunately, opponents led by Councilman Soules brought up questions and alternative options that succeeded in cutting the planned follow-up organics recycling program implementation from the 2013 budget.

City's 10-Year Recycling and Resource Recovery Plan

The SA2020 Recycling and Resource Recovery Plan, fortunately, has a zero waste agenda, with a 60% recycling goal set for 2020. As of last August the City had achieved a total recycling rate of 27%--14% from curb-side recycling, 12% brush recycling, and 1% organic recycling. Unfortunately the main problem right now is the backlash, led by District 10 Councilman Carlton Soules, who succeeded in an attack that kicked the 60% recycling rate goal down the road, from 2020 to 2025. Soules argued for a lower goal set in the SWMD's 2010 Waste Management Plan, even though the SWMD stood by newer studies showing the 60% rate by 2020 could be achieved and for an overall fee increase of just \$4 to \$5 per month.

It appears that the District 10 Councilman is a big player in zero waste plans. He has become the leader of attacks on programs and goals. As you may remember, the Alamo Group Political Committee interviewed candidate Carlton Soules before the 2010 elections and did not endorse him. Since being in office, he has been characterized as an "OCD conservative willing to nitpick City Hall initiatives, no matter how small the outlay," in the words of Elaine Wolff (see link).

Although Soules claims he only wants the best possible recycling program for San Antonio, citizen's need to question his real motives, since he has been sticking a monkey wrench in many waste plans with all kinds of contradictory arguments. Soules has also been quoted saying things that indicate other possible agendas. The Wolff article reveals that Soules "argues," one, that cheap landfill space will be plentiful in the area for decades; two, that if the City owned its own landfills it would be even cheaper than it is now, and, three, that the recycling program is, quote, 'a lot of money just to feel good about yourself.'

Can we Sierrans just leave it to fate and hope that Soules and his allies really will work for the best possible recycling program for SA and let them remain arbiters of the fine tuning? At least Soules' concerns and the delays have forced City Council members to learn much more about waste and recycling than any of them would have, which will help them to make more informed decisions. Moving toward zero waste is a commendable goal that will require big changes. I will commit to getting and posting the actual SWMD updates on these plans and programs. What can you commit to? Please help our Recycling and Political Committees so we can maintain our vigilance and keep city zero waste goals on track and well resourced.

Source Links:

- "10 Year Recycling and Resource Recovery Plan for Residential and Commercial Services," City of San Antonio SWMD, June 24, 2010, http://www.sanantonio.gov/swmd/documents/2020Plan%20_6_1.pdf
- "Staff presentation on the FY 2013 proposed budget focusing on Solid Waste Management," City Council Minutes, August 28, 2012, <https://www.sanantonio.gov/clerk/minutes/2012/2012-08-28.pdf>
- "San Antonio has issues with small multifamily unit recycling," by *Waste & Recycling News* reporter Jim Johnson, April 5, 2012, <http://www.wasterecyclingnews.com/article/20120405/NEWS02/304059993>
- "One man's plastic bag is another man's floor," by *Plaza de Armas* reporter Elaine Wolff, September 19, 2012, <http://plazadearmastx.com/index.php/business/101-news/2400-garbage-in-garbage-out>
- "Soules and Ozuna dig into the City's recycling program," by *Plaza de Armas'* Elaine Wolff, August 26, 2012, www.plazadearmastx.com/.../2344-compost-at-home-soules-and-ozu... or if you are not a Plaza de Armas subscriber at www.carltonsoules.org/news.php
- "Green carts don't have green light," by *Express News* reporter Josh Baugh, August 28, 2012, http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/Recycling-causes-council-flap-3822465.php
- "City aims for 60-percent recycling by 2025," by *Express News* reporter Josh Baugh, December 6, 2012, http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local_news/article/City-aims-for-60-percent-recycling-by-2025-4094595.php#ixzz2JAJFY2a8
- "Let the Compost Begin: Council to Vote on Curbside Organics Recycling," by *The Rivard Report's* Monika Maeckle, January 30th, 2013, <http://therivardreport.com/let-the-compost-begin-council-to-vote-on-curbside-organics-recycling/>
- "Countdown to Zero", in *Recycling Today* online, by Tiffany Edmonds, public relations manager for the San Antonio Solid Waste Management Department, November 1, 2012, <http://www.recyclingtoday.com/rt1112-zero-waste-san-antonio.aspx>

Margaret "Peggy" Day

Let's Party!

meet and greet your Sierra Club friends

This month's Social Event is at Little Italy Restaurant. It features great Italian food by real Italians. Contact [Peggy Day](mailto:PeggyDay@sierraclub.org) [(210) 829-5632, 413-6402 (cell)] if planning to attend.

Friday, February 22nd
6 to 8 p.m.

On March 22nd, we'll get together at Cheddar'S on NW Loop 410. Visit our Social Events page for maps, times and information about these and other gatherings we have planned. If your not busy on these days, then get out of the house and join us for a meal and a chance to "meet and greet" some of your fellow members.

If you would like to be reminded about our upcoming Socials, email [Loyd Cortez](mailto:LoydCortez@sierraclub.org). Then one week before the next Social, you will receive an email notice reminder.



Outings: Hikes that Lead Us Into Spring

Our Alamo Group outings participants will enjoy great weather for hikes in Friedrich Park, Government Canyon SNA, Hardberger Park and other beautiful places. Visit our Outings page for complete details or go to the [Alamo Sierra Club Outings page](#) on Meetup.



ICO Needs Your Unused Camping Gear

Do you have unused tents, sleeping bags and other camping or backpacking gear still in good condition that's taking up space in your closet? Inner City Outings would love to take them off your hands! Please contact Anne Pearson, ICO chair, 210-408-6321.

Sign Up for Action Alerts

The Sierra Club is all about citizen action on critical issues. Quick citizen input often spells the difference between victory and defeat for important measures at the local and state levels. Sign up now to receive our local e-mail Conservation Action Alerts and let your voice be heard. **Call (674-9489) or email Loyd Cortez** and we'll add your name to our growing list of environmental activists.

San Antonio's Environmental Rules Attacked

San Antonio's environmental rules are once again under assault in the 83rd Texas Legislature. Both our aquifer protection and tree ordinances were challenged in a hearing before the House Committee on Land and Resource Management.

This committee heard testimony from San Antonio developers regarding the City's "abuses of regulatory authority in the ETJ". Developers want state law changed to enable clear-cutting of trees for new developments in the extra-territorial jurisdiction. Since this is the area where most trees are destroyed during land development, passage of such a law would decimate the effectiveness of our tree preservation ordinance.

Despite testimony in support of the ordinance by officials from the City and Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, the [committee's report](#) concluded:

While the committee acknowledges the stated benefits of this ordinance, the committee has to wonder whether the ordinance impedes too heavily the rights of property owners and developers away from the military base....The city should not use their regulatory authority to have an impact on the housing that is built and the use of private property in the ETJ.

Recommendation

The committee does have concerns regarding excessive and abusive regulations which impede or deny property owners their right to develop land as they see fit. However, the committee feels these regulations should be addressed with targeted, local bills brought by members who represent the area affected by the regulations.

Developers were also seeking legislation that would nullify the impervious cover limits in San Antonio's and Austin's aquifer protection rules. Such legislation would classify the limits as a "regulatory taking" and would force the City to either pay developers for the purported reduction in land value or cease enforcement of the limits. Included in the fanciful testimony from developer lobbyists was the claim that Austin's Save Our Springs ordinance is racist.

Fortunately, the committee made the favorable recommendation that:

While the Legislature and the committee greatly value the rights of private property owners in Texas, when the act was originally passed in 1995, the Legislature exempted municipalities from inclusion. Since that time, little has changed to believe the Legislature would reverse its position that the Private Real Property Rights Preservation Act include municipalities. We remain cautious of the unintended consequences on municipalities using legitimate public policy oriented regulations.

No bills have been filed yet in response to the either of these recommendations. A copy of its report is posted [here](#).

Finally, a bill of interest to Hardberger Park lovers has been filed by Senator Robert Nichols (R-Jacksonville). This legislation, had it been in effect at the time, would have prevented the City from buying the land for Hardberger Park. Nichol's bill ([SB 96](#)) outlaws the use of eminent domain powers to obtain land for parks or recreational purposes. Those familiar with the park's history may know that Mayor Hardberger used the threat of eminent domain to prevent a Dallas developer from purchasing the Voelcker tract. Some may also remember Senator Nichols as the sponsor of the ETJ clear-cutting bill that was narrowly defeated in the 82nd Legislature.

Richard Alles, Trees and Forests Contact

Lion's Field Program Spring Vegetable Gardening

Join the Alamo Sierra Club for this month's Lion's Field Program *Spring Vegetable Gardening*. This event is **free and open to the public**.

Wednesday, February 27th:

6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Lions Field, on Broadway @ Mulberry

David Eastman of the [Gardening Volunteers of South Texas](#) will teach us about spring vegetable gardening. David has extensive gardens plus a greenhouse, so this will be an exciting program to learn about growing spring vegetables.

Visit our [Lion's Field Events page](#) for maps and additional information.

Conservation Committee Update

The Conservation Committee Planning Session met on January 30, 2013 at the Candlelight Coffeehouse on N. St. Marys Street.

Six volunteers brought their ideas and enthusiasm to the table. They were Lili Gonzales, Peggy Day, Russell Seal, Paula Nguyen, Karen Seal and Amy Abeyta. The initial planning session determined that they would like to meet as a committee from 6:00-7:00 p.m. on the first or second Thursday of each month at Candlelight. The Committee would appreciate feedback from those in attendance and from other interested volunteers about the preference for a meeting date. Comments can be sent to Karen Seal at kdseal@sbcglobal.net.

The planning session met in two groups--one from 6:00 until 7:00 and the other from 7:00 until 8:00 which worked out well for learning about the individual concerns of the participants.

The topics of conversation brought to the table at the planning meeting included the following:

The Conservation Committee has spent years lobbying City Council and encouraging them to make decisions to move onto the path to sustainability. Much of the progress made was due to the efforts of Loretta Van Coppenolle who chaired the Conservation

Committee for many years. Now that the City Council, CPS Energy and SAWS have established some great programs for the citizens of San Antonio and the surrounding areas including a weatherization program, CPS Home Manager, a tree rebate program and Mission Verde, information about these programs needs to be disseminated. The issue surrounding these programs, identified by the planning group, is that the citizens receiving a benefit from these programs have not been using these services to the optimum. It seems that many citizens are not aware of the programs or cannot afford to benefit from those services. Educating the local population about these programs through the media was discussed.

The participants from the second group identified an area in which the student volunteers might assist South San Main project (of which Lili Gonzalez is the Coordinator) in planting trees for senior citizens or families with limited incomes. They discussed checking on how that might benefit families especially if the families could get rebates for planting the trees.

The Committee discussed the Tar Sands Rally in Washington D.C. on February 17, 2013. Rita Beving with the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club is seeking volunteers who might want to share in renting a bus to join the rally. That bus would leave on February 14, 2013 and return after the rally. Volunteers are needed since this event is billed as the largest environmental rally in history.

Everyone is welcome to join. Contact Rita Beving at antiquerita@aol.com for more information.

As part of that rally and protest, Karen Seal, Conservation Committee chair, has postcards to sign and send to our representatives. Anyone interested in signing a postcard to make sure our representatives know that we oppose "taking" our property by eminent domain to build the tar sands pipeline and the possibility of damaging our limited water supplies from the pipeline, should come by the law office of Karen Seal at 202 East Park Avenue, San Antonio, Texas to get postcards to sign or call her at 210-226-8101 so arrangements can be made to get cards to anyone who wants to sign.

Waste and recycling was another issue discussed including multifamily and plastic bag recycling. There was concern that the city council had moved its goal to achieve 60% recycling in San Antonio from a target year of 2020 to 2025.

The planning session also brought up energy issues, water issues to include building more gas stations over the recharge zone and transportation as issues they might want to address this year.

Everyone is welcome to participate in the next meeting of the Conservation Committee which will be held on the first Thursday of March (March 7th) at 6:00 p.m. at the Candlelight Coffeehouse on N. St. Marys. Please keep in mind that the first Thursday designation is subject to change based on the decision of interested participants. Please contact Karen Seal if you have a preference for the first or second Thursday as a meeting date. Each of the two meetings held on January 30 lasted for one hour. Future meetings will be held to this timeline also so that volunteers can make plans around the meeting.

Karen Seal, Chair

Conservation Committee

Streetcars Make Sense

San Antonio has an opportunity to create a 21st Century transportation system, beginning with its new streetcar lines. Changing demographics are creating a need to move an emerging, younger workforce to jobs in the future. Baby Boomers will drive less, but will still want to visit places, and many young people 18 to 34 years old prefer more efficient ways to get around.

Hopping on a slick, smooth-riding, reliable streetcar, riding stress-free, and not having to search for a parking space, will be very appealing, particularly as the price of gas increases. After the starter lines go in, the system will be expanded, making many destinations possible such as colleges and universities, Fort Sam and other military facilities, and the many cultural amenities the city has to offer. Additional VIA Primo routes will link more destinations. The goal is to move people to work, to play, and businesses. For a look at VIA's comprehensive plan, go to <http://extras.mysanantonio.com/pdf/VIAFinalPlan.pdf>.

A seamless transportation system linking streetcars, light rail, VIA Primo, bus, bike, and walking is cost effective for the long haul. And one big benefit of walking and biking is improved health, another big cost savings for everyone. In a seamless system, some bus routes are realigned to drop riders at stations for quicker rides. The downtown streetcars, and light rail that has fewer stops and even greater opportunities for Transit Oriented Development at stations, run on steel tracks and are powered by electricity. If the first car fills up, another car is added. Up to 4 cars can be added, depending on length of block and car length, with only one driver needed. The cars last 30 to 50 years. If four buses were used instead, there would be four paid drivers, and the buses would need to be replaced every 12 to 20 years. The initial investment is more for streetcars, but operation and maintenance is less, and that is what is important.

According to Brian Buchanan, Vice President of Bus and Rail Strategic Planning and Project Development at VIA, soon downtown will become congested with buses. Change is necessary to ensure a good quality of life. The streetcars are silent and have no exhaust fumes. Three new electric buses, which will be introduced soon, will provide coverage on additional downtown streets and will be recharged at the multimodal stations, or transportation hubs at the Westside Multimodal Transit Center and the Robert Thompson Transit Center. VIA Primo 100 is already travelling Dolorosa/Market and Commerce Streets. Other hybrid electric buses will be used downtown, making downtown well served with new energy efficient transportation. To learn about the street car system, go to <http://www.viainfo.net/Planning/PlanningMain.aspx>. Click on options below Initiatives.

And the downtown streetcars transform areas along the routes that are blighted. Investments occur along the routes because they are permanent. Older buildings become re-purposed, or if they cannot be recycled, new ones are built because of the ease of moving people. New buildings going up in vacant parking lots also mean more revenue for the city.

Dallas has transportation options with the Dallas Area Rapid Transit system which has 45 miles of light rail and 30 miles of the Trinity Railway Express. DART will be expanded to 90 miles. Read about the economic impact of investment along the line at <http://www.dart.org/about/economicimpact.asp>.

VIA Metropolitan Transit is in the process of determining streetcar routes downtown and is seeking input from the public. Participation in the planning gives one a good perspective of the overall goals and how VIA will be addressing the city's need to have more efficient transportation options and to be cost effective both for the city and the residents.

Other sources for learning:

- www.lightrailnow.org Use search for accessing 1000s of pages of information
- <http://www.vtpi.org/> The Victoria Transport Policy Institute
- <http://www.cfte.org/> Center for Transportation Excellence

<http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/> Reconnecting America

- See also San Antonio's policy on Complete Streets:

http://www.sanantonio.gov/planning/regionalplanning/pdf/CS%20Policy_2011.09.15_v8.pdf

Barbara McMillin, Transportation Chair

Climate Change

I have never been prouder to be a member of the Sierra Club thanks to the recent decision by the Sierra Club's Board of Directors to embrace civil disobedience for the first time in our club's 120-year-old history. In the words of Executive Director Michael Brune, "For civil disobedience to be justified, something must be so wrong that it compels the strongest defensible protest." That something is the urgency of climate change and the clear knowledge that time has run out for action if we are to avoid the most catastrophic consequences of our continued dependence on fossil fuels. If you have not already read it, here's a link to Brune's inspiring statement: <http://sierraclub.typepad.com/michaelbrune/2013/01/civil-disobedience.html>

National Office has not yet revealed what the nature of the nonviolent civil disobedience will be but it will no doubt be creative and morally persuasive, and serve to invigorate efforts at every level of our Club to push President Obama and the United States to finally take leadership on the climate issue.

Sierra Club's civil disobedience will take place in the days leading up to the "Forward on Climate" rally planned for February 17 on the National Mall in Washington DC. 350.org, the Sierra Club, and the Hip Hop Caucus are jointly organizing the rally, which will not itself include acts of civil disobedience. 12,000 people have signed up to attend already and organizers hope to have 20,000 or more in attendance to make it the largest climate rally in history. For more info and/or to sign up to attend, see: <http://www.forwardonclimate.org>

Spread the word! And if you can't attend, there are plenty of other ways to be involved with the Sierra Club's 100 Days of Action campaign currently underway: <http://action.sierraclub.org/site/PageNavigator/100Days.html>

I regret I won't be able to be in Washington DC on February 17 myself, but I'll be doing my best to get the message out in my own small way. I'm running a half marathon in Austin that day and will be wearing a race shirt with the words "No to Tar Sands!" and thinking about all those gathered in DC as well as the brave Tar Sands Blockade folks in East Texas who are doing everything they can (including acts of nonviolent civil disobedience) to halt the Texas leg of the Keystone XL pipeline from being built.

Mobi Warren, Alamo Group Climate Change Contact

A Poem by Mobi Warren

Quilt Square: Whooping Cranes at Aransas Pass

The needle's slim body
skims currents of cloth
a folded Japanese handkerchief
in which blue crabs scurry.
A remnant of red silk
warms the quilted backs
of three whooping cranes—
sunrise in Aransas Refuge.
The voice of needle through silk
is the sound of marsh grass
ruffled by sea breeze.
Through cotton, the sound
of feathers dipped in black night
folded over snow-white backs.
This is the sound of rest
after long migration
the murmur of shallow tides
against slender ankles
the ease attained
after fierce and improbable
effort.
This is the last wild flock
of whooping cranes
whose fidelity of flight
binds salt marsh and boreal
forest.
Here, held in my hands
against a rising sea.



