



The North Lamar Combined Neighborhood Planning Area

Health in the NLCNPA Meeting, July 8, 2008

Meeting Notes

The Health in the NLCNPA meeting began with Jacob Browning providing a review of the Meeting Ground Rules. Mr. Browning then asked if any additions or changes needed to be made to the existing set of rules; no changes were discussed.

The meeting proceeded with a presentation by Ms. Jean Niswonger from the Steps to a Healthier Austin program which is sponsored by the Health and Human Services Department. Ms. Niswonger provided information to neighborhood stakeholders regarding chronic diseases occurring their area, those land use patterns that affect health, and the proper access to healthy food vendors and recreational facilities.

During the presentation, many questions regarding these health-related issues were asked. These questions and their answers can be found below:

Q. How can we promote the use of electric cars in our neighborhood? More specifically, how can alternate energy sources be promoted in common areas throughout the neighborhood?

Comment: Remember that we are in a poor area of the City; these alternatives are out of our reach. Heavy financial incentives are needed to encourage investment in these alternatives here. Can the City of Austin balance this with a subsidy?

Comment: These alternatives are interesting, but why would you want to invest in something like this in our area with the potential of it getting stolen? But, there is the potential for the use of public spaces (schools, parks) as areas for alternate energy generation.

Staff: These are very interesting ideas, and we can get more information from Austin Energy and other sources to relay back to you. We can revisit this later and possibly have a meeting dedicated to alternate energy sources/generation in the future if this is a large area of interest for stakeholders. But, for now, we need to focus on tonight's topic: health-related issues in North Lamar.

Q. Are there any models or programs that promote healthy activities in areas of high crime occurrences?

A. The Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) program offers design guidelines that provide safer environments for physical activities. [Research is currently being done on how to incorporate the CPTED program into the North Lamar neighborhoods.] There are other programs currently in progress in urban areas that include the involvement of a policing authority and of the citizens of each of these areas. We can provide you with this information if you would like.

Discussion: Uses for Open Space

For smaller spaces: Dog park, Frisbee

Other areas: Basketball courts (on already paved areas), playground equipment (needs shading in Austin), outdoor fitness equipment for adults (available at Barrington Elementary), soccer, group activities, larger spaces can support outside trails, safety (lightning rods for pavilions)

Q. Are there any instructions on how to use the fitness machines at Barrington?

A. We can receive the proper labels from the equipments' manufacturers and provide those to the users.

Q. Can shelter or lightning rods be provided so to prevent deaths or injuries from lightning strikes in open spaces?

A. That's a good idea, and you'll be able to add it to a "wish list" during the mapping exercise once this discussion is done.

Q. Can the Health and Human Services Department provide us with contacts (of active citizens) in the community that may be willing to mentor residents in achieving a healthier lifestyle?

A. We do not have a specific clearinghouse with this information, but there are specific people/HHS partners that may be of assistance here. HHS can help find these people if there is a specific need or certain event; we can also make a list of organizations that can help with getting equipment or recreational facilities for physical activities. We will definitely work on getting a list together for the NLCNPA.

Q. Is the survey data you presented not specific to zip codes?

A. Most of the data presented tonight was not specific to zip codes; however, there are particular instances where data can be found at this level. There are no specific collection methods for each type of data

Q. Where can we find information regarding reproductive health?

A. From the State's health department.

Q. If I'm interested in getting data at the zip code level, where can we get that data?

A. Very little health data is reported at that detailed of a level; the sample size within such a small area may make the data invalid. The data is just not comprehensive at that level; that's why it's reported at a regional level. However, the Travis County Health Department can help you with getting any requested data (if available). There is an online mapper for you to find further information and data on a regional/MSA level. The mapper can be found at this website: <http://www.cdc.gov/BRFSS/>.

Q. Will the State ownership of North Lamar Boulevard affect developments along it?

A. A study is currently being conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute and by TxDOT; the study is in its early phases. We can find more information and talk about it at the next meeting which focuses upon the North Lamar corridor. We can also help with finding outlets for community input.

Comment: Neighbors have been objected to the relocation of the new healthcare facility. It should be located south of Techridge Boulevard because there may be more opportunity for people to access it there.

Q. HEB is a good corporate citizen in Austin. What can our HEB store do to help out our community?

A. This is something that can definitely be looked into. Stores stock their shelves according to the micro-market that shops there; a particular store caters/tailors its stock to its clientele. Talk to the store's manager to see if there is a possibility to increase the availability of healthier food choices at your store. HEB can also be a potential funder for some of the items you have mentioned on your wish-lists (found below).

Comment: HEB should provide cooking classes to reach out to community members.

Once the presentation was finished and all questions had been answered, neighborhood stakeholders participated in an exercise whereby they mapped issues related to health within and around the NLCNPA. Stakeholders discussed the positive and negative aspects of the NLCNPA in regards to access to stores/businesses with higher nutritional values and choices and to areas for recreational activities. Barriers to these locations were also mapped. Everyone was also given the opportunity to provide staff with a wish-list of healthy-related items they would like to see located within the NLCNPA. These items can be found below:

Wish-list Items

Nutrition

- Safe grocery store with healthy options; wider range of options/supplements (upgraded HEB?)
- Farmers' markets in available open spaces
- Community gardens in public (PARD) spaces
- Restaurants with a greater amount of healthy choices

Physical Activities

- Safe areas for physical activities
- Trails around the community gardens
- More open space for kids and adults
- Walking and biking space
- Alternate transit
- Police call-boxes near or around parks
- Increased number of street lights that work
- More pedestrian crossings