

February 24, 2012

Whispers 2-24-12

Apparently the Lord was willing and the creek did rise . . . The **Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer Conservation District** was happy last night to lower the current drought status to **Alarm Stage II**. The district has been in **Critical Stage III** since September, and was not expected to make a recovery any time soon. Charts distributed at the meeting showed current trigger levels to be well within the parameters of Alarm Stage II. “We’ve now had sustained significant creek flow at the upper end of the recharge zone, and water entering the recharge zone and recharging the aquifer,” said **General Manager Kirk Holland**. “We may well emerge from the drought, going into a no drought condition in the next several weeks and our best guess is that we’re not likely to fall back into the Stage III Critical Drought until late May, or early June.” . . .

Recyclable plastic bags? . . . Texas Disposal Systems CEO Bob Gregory was spotted at City Hall on Wednesday with lobbyist **David Armbrust**. Presumably, the pair was working to inform council members about a Gregory proposal to recycle those plastic bags that the Council seems ready to at least restrict. According to an email sent to Council members – and further distributed by **Public Safety Commission Vice Chair** and committed e-mailer **Mike Levy** – the idea would “create a program that would allow residents to place single use plastic bags, and potentially all film plastics, into their blue single stream cart, only if they are consolidated or stuffed into another bag that is secure and strong enough to survive in the form of a stuffed pillow without bursting, until they reach the pre-sort conveyor or section of the MRF recycling system where the stuffed bag or pillow can be removed by hand.” The city’s **Environmental Board** suggested investigating a proposal not unlike Gregory’s when they recommended their version of the bag ban. The city is set to conduct a public hearing on the matter at next Thursday’s Council meeting. Gregory has previously stated that loose plastic bags can gum up the works of the sorting equipment at a recycling facility . . .

Meter report coming . . . As the **City Council’s Audit and Finance** subcommittee tackled the subject of extended **Capital Metro Red Line** hours on Thursday, questions about downtown parking meters came up. **El Sol y La Luna** owner **Nilda de la Llata** told Council members that a late running commuter train could make up for the shortcomings of what she called the “horrible impact” of the new extended parking meter hours downtown. **Council Members Laura Morrison** and **Bill Spelman** took the opportunity to question the head of Austin’s **Transportation Department Robert Spillar** about an expected report on the effect of the program. Spillar told Morrison and Spelman that his team would have a report ready sometime in March. “It was never anyone’s intention on this dais or at the Transportation Department for this to have a bad impact on business,” said Spelman, who added that he and his colleagues had intended to have a positive impact by freeing up parking with space turnover that they expected to come with meter installation. “We’re going to get some more information on whether we had the effect we desired or whether we had the opposite effect,” he continued. . . .

Panel endorses Imagine Austin plan . . . The city’s **Comprehensive**

Plan Citizens Advisory Task Force has endorsed the **Imagine Austin** citywide comprehensive plan after hearing public input and scrutinizing its vision for this community's future. Imagine Austin outlines community priorities and action steps that will lead to fundamental change in how Austin works as it grows. **Judge Margaret Cooper** has chaired the Task Force for the last 2.5 years. The Task Force overwhelmingly backed the plan at its final meeting on Tuesday. The Task Force's endorsement sends the comprehensive plan to the **Planning Commission** for review. The Planning Commission has a briefing scheduled for next Tuesday and public hearings March 13 and 27. The Planning Commission is expected to forward the comprehensive plan to the City Council in April for its review. Council is expected to vote on the plan in late May. For more information on the plan, go to www.imagineaustin.net/chapters. . . . **Pfishing for Lawyers** . . . A note from the **Texas State Bar Association** to its members warns that some have received an email recently with the subject line: "Texas Bar Account Suspended." The recipient is then asked to click on a link and provide information to have the account restored. The folks at the State Bar Association are warning that this is a bogus message, and that the Bar would never ask for such information online. Attorneys who receive this message and are concerned about their information should contact the Bar at (800)204-2222, ext. 6836. . . . **Meetings** . . . The **CAMPO Transit Working Group** meets at 1:30pm In Council Chambers at City Hall.