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Austin Sun

ETERNAL LIFE FOR BARTON'S? FORGET IT.

by Michael Eakin

For a March day blossoming full into Zilker springtime the vista last Saturday was a strange one indeed. The kiddie train chugged through Zilker Park, sure, but Barton Pool, long the flower of Austin, lay vacant and padlocked, closed by executive decree. Closed because of bureaucratic bungling and a hydra-headed City project called "Floodwater Bypass Improvements at Barton Springs Pool."

The prestigious sound of that title came as no help to one very hassled, slightly overweight park ranger. His job was to clear kids from 7 to 47 swimming in the spillway below the east dam. This man had problems. How do you explain to people their days of spring swimming are over until mid-July? Or maybe even the end of August. Pity the poor fellow.

But pity more the people of Austin, who fail to understand the long range impact of their government's policy on Barton pool and the length of what is mostly pristine, untouched creek and canyon, the most unique natural phenomena in Travis County. Even now with sewage pipes gouging relentlessly through Skunk Hollow and subdivisions springing up like madness along the developer's dream, Loop 360 and MoPac.

But I overstep my thesis. You're just another schlock who wants to swim once or twice a week at Barton's. Why can't you swim?

An "Unfortunate" Situation

The easy, too easy answer is that the city's Parks and Recreation and Construction - Management departments blew their timing by not getting activity underway in the winter. Parks and Rec head Jack Robinson requested the bypass construction in August, expected it by fall, but the "consultant ran into problems, and it was delayed until January."

According to Bill Sealover of Construction - Management his department didn't want construction to occur until spring anyway. He says

the construction people felt a spring date might cause an unlucky contractor to lose his money in the event a "minor flash flood" came down Barton Creek. That discounts the fact that some of the year's largest rains come in April and May. But Sealover maintains that from an engineering standpoint spring is a much better time to build for the contractor. In any event, the consultant — Travis Associates — underwent "timing complications" in the fall. Thus was the project delayed: "an unfortunate situation."

Indictment in Print

A deeper question is why the occurrence of flood debris from ordinary rainfall is a major rather than a minor problem for Barton pool. According to members of the city's environmental board the Parks Department was unable to give exact figures concerning Barton's "down

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days", and estimates range depending on the department — from thirty to seventy days. But the city's own bypass rationale is to be found in the Capital Improvement Program budget, the five year construction plan for the city. In '72 the *raison d'être* read pretty straightforwardly:

"Construction of a flood water bypass to handle moderate flash flooding and low flow which pollutes Barton Springs Pool. Development within the Barton Springs watershed represents a potential safety and health hazard to swimmers. Development upstream which creates local flooding requires closing of the pool up to 30 days per season."

By 1974 the city's version had shortened. It read:

This project will involve the



construction of a bypass for Barton Creek floodwaters around the pool. Engineering studies for this project are now underway.

Why, one wonders, did the city change its CIP description of the floodwater bypass? In so many words the first CIP account told us this: increasingly the Planning Commission and City Council are approving subdivisions for the banks and watershed of Barton Creek. By increasing the urbanized surface of the Barton watershed and decreasing the land's natural cover, runoff water that would otherwise seep down into the Edwards Aquifer is now washing into the creek itself. There the rainfall meets the city's sewage pipes

Barton's runoff has "gradually increased" over the past ten years, but that's about it. Parks and Recreation Director Jack Robinson says the city has heard pollution predictions for years and "we've seen none of it." City Water and Wastewater chief Curtis Johnson told the Sun he doesn't anticipate "any significant difficulties" in pollutants affecting springs. And they cite the recent report by the Texas Water Quality Board which reported Barton spring water as still highly pure.

No Eternal Springs

Not everyone shares the city's optimism. Gunner Brune of the Water Development Board says hard numerical data is yet to be taken from the Barton watershed; he believes the Edwards Aquifer which underlies Barton is "definitely in danger of pollution if they keep building out there." How long might it be before the springs dry: "That's impossible to say without an exhaustive study. It's anybody's guess. I'm just surprised there hasn't been any significant pollution thus far."

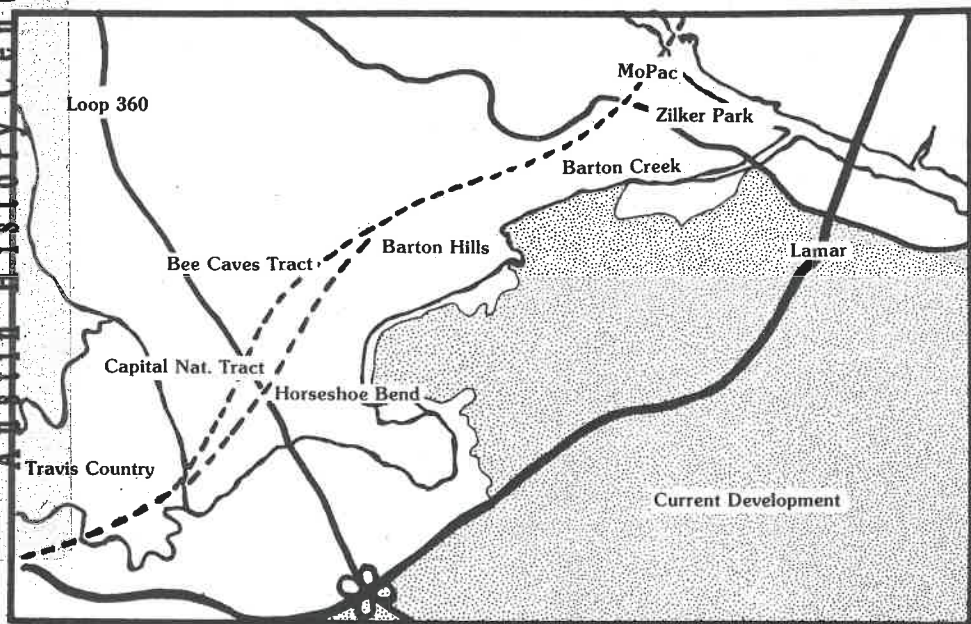
The Edwards Aquifer is, of course, the key to Barton Springs. Flowing under parts of Austin, San Antonio and most of Central Texas, the aquifer constitutes massive limestone formation of stored water which seeps down through innumerable faults and fissures. Where development covers an Edwards Aquifer recharge area the springs will eventually dry. The very process has occurred already to Shoal Creek, and only recently the Water Quality Board placed severe controls over Northwest San Antonio, designed to protect the sensitive aquifer.

It is this point, so critical to the well being of Barton Springs, that local zoologist James Yantis addressed in a

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recent meeting before the city's environmental board. "The most important problem of the 'sewage [Barton Creek] line' is the geohydrology. The Edwards Aquifer is somewhere beneath the creek. The area is heavily faulted and cavernous. There is no reliable way to detect small tunnels into the earth. A foot wide tunnel could carry a lot of sewage into the aquifer."

Blind Men Won't See

The lesson is easily seen for those willing to see. The only real solution to preserve the integrity of aquifer areas and thus springs is to limit development to those areas that do not overlap aquifers. In Austin that would mean steering development to selected areas in the north, northeast, south and southeast. Not to the west or southwest.

But that kind of an approach would base city decisions on long range land use planning rather than short range popgun measures like the Barton Creek Floodwater Bypass. And true planning the City of Austin does not do.

So. Let's pause a moment, create a juncture, reflect. Admittedly the thesis, even the subject matter of a "floodwater bypass" story is straying rapidly. But to understand why is to understand how Austin ticks. For all construction projects are related in environmental unplanning: all of them. The city will not and presently cannot save the Barton watershed because it does not plan: it follows.

Like a horse forever trailing a dithered toad, Austin must grow in idiot fashion because its development follows sprawl-designed highways and creek-destroying sewer lines.

Take a look at the adjacent map. By extending MoPac and Loop 360 to their meeting points southwest of Austin our "planners" have succeeded in (1) forging four-lane highways that essentially travel nowhere, and (2) directly stimulating the growth of noncontiguous development, which is directly contrary to the city's stated policy. Before, the Barton Creek watershed remained relatively untouched; now the proposed Sid Jagers' Bee Caves tract and Capital National Taylor Gaines tract involve housing units numbering in the several thousands.

That is why the Barton pool floodwater bypass is integrally related to the extension of MoPac South, and why the entire watershed cannot be separated from construction of Loop 360, a taxpayer paid mass of four lane blacktop leading nowhere but speculative developmentville 5 to 10 miles from the city. If the Zilker Park ranger has trouble explaining this spring's closedown we really want to pity him twenty years hence. That'll be 1995, when the city's projected population for the Barton Creek watershed runs about 25,000 people. Or forty five years away in 2020, when a projected 96,000 people live within the watershed of a major unique aquifer and Austin's spring fed pool. Who knows? By that time we may need another floodwater bypass.

Interview

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human liberty from the superficial liberal who will run to the state for protection every time the slightest hint of disorder creeps into the edge of the social landscape. The idea that dueling should be prohibited typifies the thinking of those who view paternalistic government as the best defense against barbarism.

Who is the barbarian? It is obviously the person who would not allow a citizen to give free reign to his emotions, to exercise his free will in the highly symbolic form we know as dueling. The prohibition of dueling is an historic injury which we can redress, here in Austin, Texas, as an example to a world too jaded and timid to revel in the wilder side of human nature.

SUN: How do you plan to renovate the police department if elected?

Paul: I would like to see police patrol cars employed to provide a free taxi service for Austin. I think this meets two needs. One is to provide more mass transportation. Everybody's talking about mass transportation and this could be a start because it puts an existing resource to work. Cop cars patrol around and don't really perform much of a useful function. It's pretty ridiculous to send patrolmen "doing laps" around East Austin when they could be providing a useful service to the people who pay to inflate their tires.

Taxi riders will naturally be obliged to aid patrolmen who are answering emergency calls. This will allow them

to observe police operation first hand, and as representatives of the larger community, to allow day-to-day, on-the-spot civilian review of law enforcement without resorting to bureaucratic remedies.

SUN: Paul, one last question. Earlier this evening you mentioned Jeff Friedman and an interesting little anecdote about him. Do you support Friedman for mayor and what happened the first time you met him?

Paul: First of all, Jeff Friedman does not stand for change in our politics. He expects to expend \$50,000 in his campaign. It's obvious he is a coward trying to hide behind a \$50,000 snow job instead of trying to run a campaign which stands for anything different. Friedman keeps going more towards the center to preserve his respectability.

SUN: What about the story?

Paul: Jeff and I had a fairly interesting exchange. When I first announced my candidacy at the first press conference, I said the reason I had decided I could no longer sit on the sidelines was because I basically felt that Friedman had grown too fat in office and that I had entered the contest amid rumors he had been spending his \$10 a week council pay on milkshakes. When I met him and told him I was running for his old job, he said, "You must be Paul" and said he was so insulted by my comment that he was getting fat on milkshakes that he had gone on a diet.

Hyacinth Harbor

Scientists at NASA are experimenting with weeds that eat pollution and which can later be converted into fuel.

Researchers at National Space Technology laboratories in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, are using hyacinths to remove industrial waste from rivers. The plants reportedly remove not only heavy metals,

Hyacinths grow extremely fast — with an acre of the plants producing 525 dry pounds of weed every 24 hours. As a result, the researchers have been able to take the used plants, dry them, and convert them into a "bio-gas" similar to natural gas. such as mercury and lead, but pesticides and phosphate chemicals as well.

Spot Learns

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"For some reason she thinks that whenever strangers enter the classroom, they are coming to take her away. She used to cry and get very upset if a new person walked in. But she's feeling more secure these days. She's improving."

Just then the child in question ran up to show me something. Ms. Byers smiled at me.

I was impressed with the whole scene — the relaxed, casual atmosphere these ladies provided; the obvious concern they showed for the children; and the children, who seemed to be enjoying themselves and each other. Though program materials were not the newest and most modern, they seemed to be organized with care toward providing an interesting environment for learning and recreation.

Of Child, Inc.'s 21 centers, 16 are federally funded and five are locally funded. These sources foot the entire day care bill if a family falls within the range of the proper income levels. For the HEW programs, a family with one or two children must earn an annual

income of \$4,321 or less; with three children, \$4,901 or less; four children, \$5,551 or less; five children, \$6,201 or less, and so on.

Qualifying for the 4-A funded centers depends on total family size and income. A family of two must earn \$5,010 or less annually; of three, \$6,212 or less; of four, \$7,421 or less; of five, \$8,630 or less. One must also show that the family has been or is presently receiving welfare benefits, or has debilitating circumstances which would qualify it to receive welfare in the near future.

These are by no means the only requirements, although I was told that the HEW centers have simpler qualifications than do the 4-A centers. Fund sources change other qualifications so often as to make it impossible for me to list them here. Persons interested in getting details may go to the office of Child, Inc. at 818 E. 53rd 1/2 St.; ask for Ruby Fowler or Lois Ray, or call at 451-7447.

Next issue: University and other commercial day care; special education day care and more.

Jimmy Snell

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