

# Pall on Mall Environmental Controls Not Built

by Phillip Blackerby

In mid-August, the Barton Creek Square Mall opened to the public. However, the Mall's pollution controls were not completed. Over the objections of the Save Barton Creek Association, temporary occupancy permits were granted to the Mall's tenants by City staff.

The Save Barton Creek Association is categorically opposed to permitting the Mall to operate without the pollution controls. Here's why:

The Mall site includes about 120 acres. Of this, over 100 acres will be covered by the Mall itself or its enormous parking lot.

Every time it rains, the rainwater washes the silt, oil, litter, and animal wastes off the roof and parking lot. Theoretically, this dirty runoff water is supposed to go into detention ponds, where the particles of pollution settle out of the water. The water is then filtered before it is allowed to flow on down to Barton Creek.

Once in Barton Creek, the water seeps into an underground "river" flowing through cracks in the limestone bedrock. This underground "river" is called the Edwards Aquifer. Barton Creek supplies about 30 percent of the Aquifer's water.

The Edwards Aquifer, in turn, bubbles up at Barton Springs. Thousands of Austinites swim in these nationally-famous waters regularly.

Past the Barton Springs Pool, the springwater flows into Town Lake, just upriver from the Green Water Treatment Plant, which provides drinking water for major sections of the city.

Since mid-August, the Mall has been open to the public, and the silt, oil, litter and animal wastes have been accumulating on the roof and parking lot. But neither the detention ponds, nor the filters have been operational.

Therefore, every time it rains, polluted water flows directly into Barton Creek, the Edwards Aquifer, Barton Springs Pool, Town Lake, and the City water system.

If you dare, swim in Barton Springs a few hours after a good rain. Swim upstream (South) from the diving area to the Springs themselves. If you can see through the water at all, look at it just as it bubbles up. Chances are that you will actually see the silt and other pollution coming up directly from the Aquifer.

Chemically, the polluted waters may be highly toxic. The best known dangers (not the worst dangers) are from lead (from automobile exhausts) and fecal coliform (bacteria fed by litter and animal wastes).

Just last month, Barton Springs was closed for two days because of "murkiness." According to Dr. Maureen McReynolds, Director of the City's Office of Environmental Resource Management, the U. S.

Geological Survey tested Barton Springs water for fecal coliform when the Pool was closed. The final report on these tests is not available, but Dr. McReynolds reports that the fecal coliform counts showed a "significant elevation;" the levels found were "higher than you would have permitted for swimming."

In effect, the City is subsidizing the Mall owners by allowing the Mall to operate and make money without adequate pollution controls. This subsidy may include lost admissions revenue while the Pool is closed, or it may be in the form of consequent ill

## 80% say, "No Mall"

by Grant Thomas

One item conspicuously absent from all the hoopla attendant upon the recent opening of the Barton Creek Square Mall was the fact that the filtration ponds designed to reduce the pollution in the runoff into the Creek and aquifer had not been completed by the time of the opening. Moreover, there were no clear indications whether the ponds would be effective once they were in fact in place. These events are seriously at variance with the pledge of the original owner of the Mall, who had professed a sincere commitment to maintaining the quality of the water in the creek.

The September 8 edition of the Austin Citizen featured a powerful sampling of public opinion about this "oversight" on the part of the developers. In response to the "SOUND OFF" question, "Should Barton Creek Square Mall be permitted to remain open if proper environmental safeguards are not in place?", a resounding eighty percent of Citizen readers answered with an emphatic "No". Typical comments were those of F. Ming of 7216 Whispering Winds - "The detention ponds were part of the contract and because that has not been followed, they have broken the contract. I consider that illegal"; Karen Day of 620 S. First St. - "The natural beauty of Barton Creek is shared by Austinites of all backgrounds. It is more important than retail saturation"; and James Hivener of 7600 Glenhill Cove - "Developers did not fulfill their part of the agreement. If they were closed down the safeguards would be completed in record time."

In view of the Citizen's traditional nonchalance about many of the depredations of the development industry, the results of this survey are all the more significant. They indicate that even if the developers of the mall have no conscience, most of the citizens of Austin still do. They also suggest that many people may choose to do their shopping somewhere other than at Barton Creek.

health of citizens who swim in what they assume to be clean Barton Springs.

When zoning for the Mall was granted, the applicants promised not to pollute Barton Creek any more than in the natural state. Clearly this promise is being broken every day that the Mall is operating without pollution controls.

Even if the pollution controls were operating, it is not clear that the Mall owners will live up to their promise. Here's why:

- The detention ponds are designed to hold only the "first flush" of runoff. A major storm (more than 1/2 inch in the first hour) would overflow the ponds, letting polluted water flow directly into Barton Creek.

- The pollutants that settle out of storm runoff accumulate in the bottom of the ponds. If the ponds are not cleaned out regularly, they will hold less water, and will overflow more easily.

- Chemical pollutants that mix with water in solution will not settle out in the detention ponds, and cannot be filtered out. These pollutants will flow directly into Barton Creek regardless of the controls as currently designed.

The detention ponds are therefore a potential pollution "point source." Navigable streams like Barton Creek are protected from point source pollution under federal law. The Save Barton Creek Association will continue to monitor the Mall's pollution control systems, and is prepared to file suit in federal court to protect the quality of Barton Springs water.

In the meanwhile, we'll keep swimming at Barton Springs, rather than shopping at the Mall.

## The Sentinel

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