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SOS initiative springs to landslide win

By Bill Collier
American-Statesman Staff

Austin voters gave an overwhelming endorsement on Saturday to strong development regulations to protect their beloved Barton Springs, the city's environmental crown jewel.

The Save Our Springs Coalition ordinance — Ordinance No. 1, placed on the ballot by a citizen initiative — won by nearly a 2-1 ratio, 64 percent in favor and 36 percent opposed.

Ordinance No. 2, which would have left existing controls in place while a regional plan to protect the springs was sought, was defeated, 35 percent for and 65 percent against.

"Excessive development causes landslides," said SOS backer Bill Bunch, referring to the over-

Key results

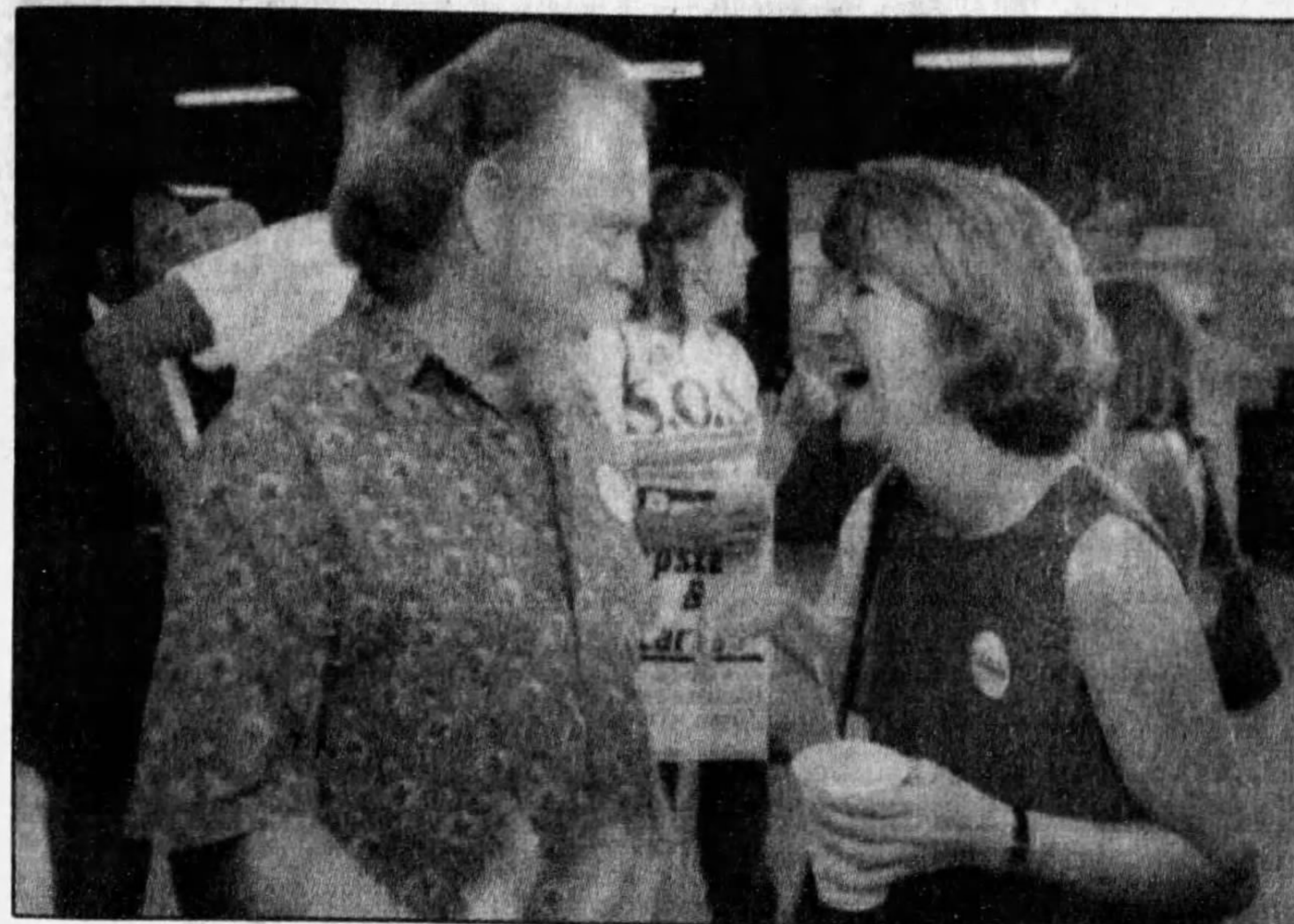
135 of 135 boxes counted

	Percentages YES	NO
Ord. 1: SOS	64	36
Ord. 2: Alt.	35	65
Prop. 10: BCCP	65	35
Prop. 11: Parkland	60	40
Prop. 12: Arts center	47	53

whelming victory. "The vote on SOS was for Barton Springs. The vote against the regional plan was a loud and clear message to the City Council."

Austin Mayor Bruce Todd said he thinks the council heard that message.

"The people spoke today with a
See SOS-backed, A19



Brigid Shea is congratulated by Council Member Max Nofziger at Palmer Auditorium after it became apparent that the SOS initiative would pass.

Staff photo by Ralph Barrera

Balcones, Barton land bonds approved as voters think green

By Bill Collier
American-Statesman Staff

Riding a wave of voter support for protecting Austin's natural heritage for future generations, two city bond proposals to buy land for nature preserves and parks soared to strong victories in Saturday's election.

Proposition 10, which authorizes \$22 million to buy 11,725 acres west of Austin for the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan, won by 65 percent to 35 percent.

Proposition 11, which provides \$20 million for the purchase of

1,048 acres for the Barton Creek Wilderness Park, also won handily, 60 percent to 40 percent.

Mayor Bruce Todd, who chaired the committee that drafted the Balcones plan, said, "This is a tremendously positive statement the community has given us to proceed with the vision of protecting some of the most beautiful land in the western part of the county."

Jim Fries of the Texas Nature Conservancy, which worked hard for the passage of Proposition 10, said, "The people of Austin saw the true merit of a consensus plan that protects environmental quali-

See \$42 million, A18

Austin bond election

SOS-backed initiative approved by 2-1 ratio

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very loud voice," said Todd. "They were not confused; they spoke very clearly."

The turnout of 73,308 voters, or 27.6 percent of those registered, was not a record for a city election but was considered high for an election devoid of City Council candidates.

The SOS victory margin was set with the very first numbers tallied — the extended voting ballot box — and never altered substantially. "It's over before it even started," said SOS campaign manager Mark Yznaga.

Each time updated numbers were posted at election central at Palmer Auditorium, an exuberant crowd of 300 to 400 SOS supporters cheered and chanted "SOS! SOS!"

SOS ran strongly in most parts of the city, garnering 90 percent to 95 percent of the vote total in some University of Texas-area precincts.

Cathy Berry of the Citizens for Responsible Planning, the chief anti-SOS group, said the opposition campaign started too late to get its message through to voters effectively.

The fight against the SOS ordinance, Berry said, will now shift to the courts, the state Legislature and the Texas Water Commission.

Sparks also are expected at the City Council, where a majority of anti-SOS council members will oversee the staff's writing of rules to implement it.

But Todd warned his colleagues against any effort to undermine the SOS proposal.

"I hope the council understands the message sent tonight," Todd said. "The instructions were to defend the SOS ordinance with great vigor."

Supporters of the effort to recall Council Members Louise Epstein and Bob Larson were at polling places around the city but could not provide figures on how many signatures were gathered Saturday.

The SOS ordinance limits development in the Barton Springs zone southwest of the city to a maximum of 15 to 25 percent impervious cover — the amount of buildings and pavement covering

Saturday's election results

PROPOSITION	FOR	AGAINST
1 EMS	52,098 75.0%	17,677 25.0%
2 Fire stations	51,945 73.8%	18,419 26.2%
3 Police substations	50,928 72.6%	19,187 27.4%
4 Public health and safety	39,516 56.7%	30,120 43.3%
5 Flood control	48,287 68.2%	22,532 31.8%
6 Street repair	49,825 71.6%	19,799 28.4%
7 Sidewalks	40,522 58.8%	28,416 41.2%
8 Park improvements	48,374 68.3%	22,441 31.7%
9 Libraries	49,510 69.7%	21,492 30.3%
10 Balcones Canyonlands	45,927 64.7%	25,108 35.3%
11 Parkland Acquisition	42,268 60.1%	28,017 39.9%
12 Cult. Arts Center/Carver Mus.	31,335 46.7%	35,779 53.3%
13 Municipal building	22,512 34.5%	42,696 65.5%
14 Performing Arts center	30,321 46.0%	35,558 54.0%
15 Electric utility improvements	39,267 60.2%	35,952 39.8%
16 Water/wastewater improv.	40,865 62.2%	24,784 37.8%
17 Deauthorize elec. utility bonds	47,927 74.3%	16,565 25.7%
18 Deauthorize conserv. bonds	47,098 73.5%	16,960 26.5%
19 Deauthorize water utility bonds	48,389 75.2%	15,966 24.8%
20 Deauthorize water utility bonds	47,788 74.2%	16,619 25.8%
21 Deauthorize water utility bonds	47,788 74.7%	16,152 25.3%
22 Deauthorize sewer bonds	47,881 74.8%	16,148 25.2%
ORDINANCE	FOR	AGAINST
1 SOS Initiative	46,246 63.8%	26,187 36.2%
2 Council-sponsored alternative	24,140 35.1%	44,556 64.9%

135 of 135 boxes counted

the ground. It also requires that pollutants in post-development rainfall runoff not exceed pre-development levels.

Ordinance No. 2, often called the City Council-sponsored alternative ordinance, would have left existing city controls intact and directed the council to work with the Texas Water Commission and the Lower Colorado River Authority to develop a plan for the entire Barton Springs zone, 70 percent of which lies outside city jurisdiction. This ordinance also would have directed the city to eliminate existing pollution problems and buy sensitive lands to protect water quality.

The SOS ordinance was backed by a strong coalition of environmental organizations, as well as numerous individual Austin businesses. Ordinance No. 2 was supported by the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, the Real Estate Council of Austin and numerous other business and development interests.

The election was the latest — and perhaps the most spectacular — milestone in Austin's history of attempting to protect Barton Springs, an effort dating back to the 1960s.

The springs were enjoyed by Native Americans for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. According to Native American legend, the Great Spirit created the springs by hurling a rainbow against the limestone of the Edwards Aquifer, splitting the rock so that the cool, clear water could flow forth.

Since Austin was settled a century and a half ago, it is doubtful most residents have accepted that theory of the springs' creation. But it hasn't mattered. The 32-million-gallon-a-day stream of 68-degree water — in an area where temperatures soar in summertime, just as they did Saturday — has been about as close to a fountain of youth as you can get.

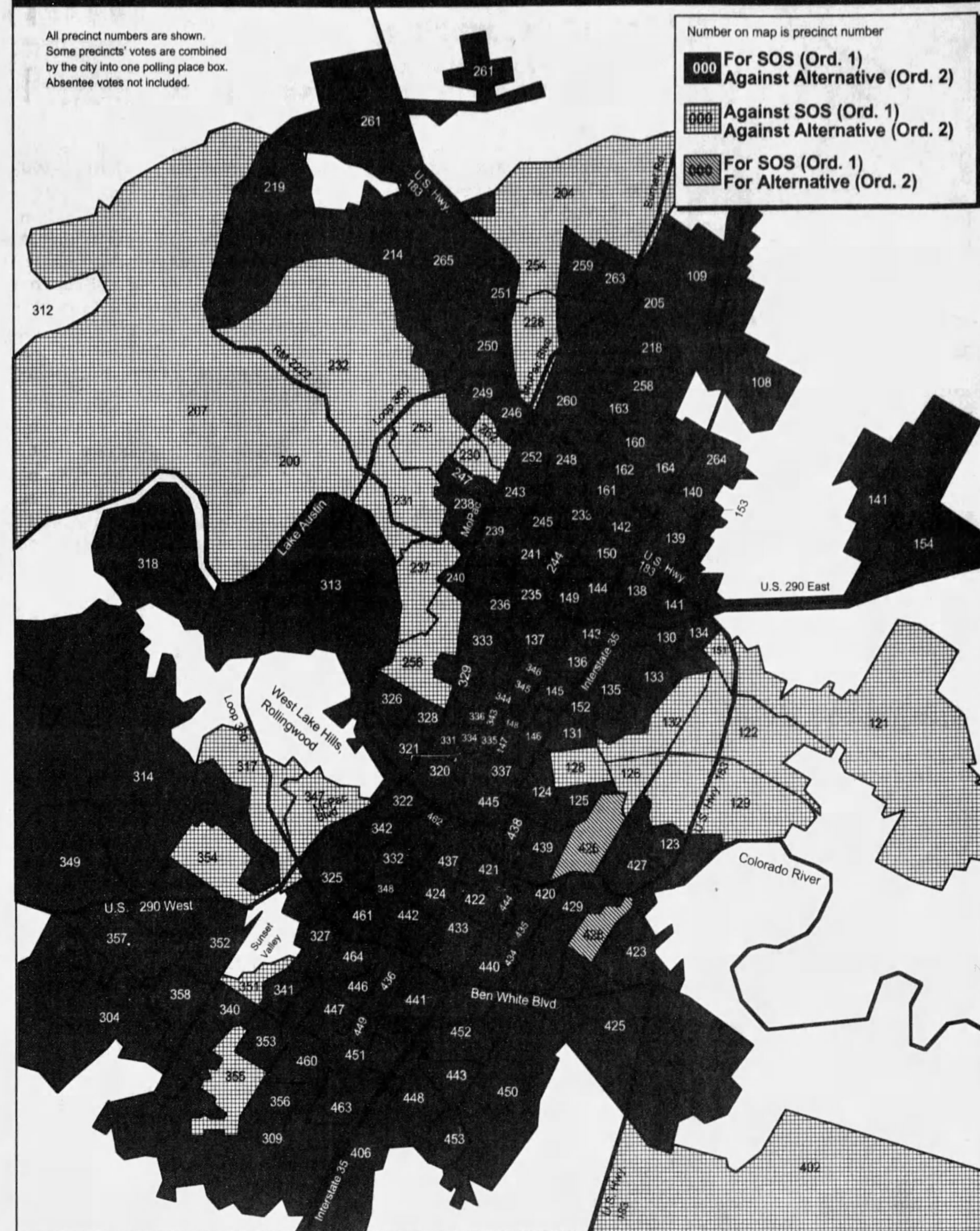
Besides being the city's favorite oasis, the springs are the canary in

Water quality ordinance vote

All precinct numbers are shown. Some precincts' votes are combined by the city into one polling place box. Absentee votes not included.

Number on map is precinct number

000 For SOS (Ord. 1)
Against Alternative (Ord. 2)
000 Against SOS (Ord. 1)
Against Alternative (Ord. 2)
000 For SOS (Ord. 1)
For Alternative (Ord. 2)



Staff graphics

the coal mine for the 354-square-mile area in Travis and Hays counties that feeds them.

In 1980, after extensive study, the city adopted an ordinance designed to protect Barton Creek from the rainfall runoff of new developments. In subsequent years, similar ordinances were applied to the other watersheds in the Barton Springs zone and in 1986, the city adopted its Comprehensive Watersheds Ordinance to combine and redefine its water quality regulations.

But during the now-famous all-

night City Council hearing on June 7, 1990 on Barton Creek Properties' proposal to develop 4,000 acres on Barton Creek, city environmental officials said the 1986 ordinance was inadequate to protect the creek and springs.

Those regulations were replaced temporarily in February 1991 with a city staff-written ordinance that — like the SOS ordinance — strictly limited impervious cover. But after extensive debate, the council replaced that ordinance in October with new rules that require the treatment of runoff, but

permit impervious cover levels of 20 to 70 percent.

Environmentalists assailed the October ordinance as woefully inadequate and set about gathering the nearly 27,000 signatures needed to trigger Saturday's successful election on the SOS proposal.

The politics of water quality proved to be as tough and bitter as any other politics, and the weeks leading up to Saturday's vote were laced with charges and countercharges and allegations of exaggerations from both sides.