

# Residents opposing greenbelt expansion

■ Woods of Westlake group wants parkland cleaned up, crime-free

**By ANDY ALFORD**

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Having a permanent greenbelt and a hike-and-bike trail on a neighborhood's border is usually an asset and a homeowner's dream.

But West Austin residents of the Woods of Westlake neighborhood Tuesday asked the Austin Planning Commission to postpone a decision to expand and improve the nearby Barton Creek Greenbelt, which they see as a mixed blessing. The commission postponed the decision until June 8.

Continuing the city's drive to zone all city-owned property for public use and to protect land in the Barton Creek Watershed, the planning commission had expected Tuesday to rezone about 1,300 acres along Barton Creek in West Austin for use as public parkland. The city wants to improve trails, access and parking along the Barton Creek Greenbelt and Wilderness Park, which with its sheer cliffs and spring-fed swimming holes runs for almost eight miles within the city.

The city bought a large chunk of the

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**See Group, B5**



Cassandra Watkins, chairwoman of the Woods of Westlake Neighborhood Association, said she believes crime in her area is linked to the Barton Creek trail. Watkins lives in the neighborhood near the Barton Creek Greenbelt Trailend Access point on Camp Craft Road.

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# Group fights greenbelt expansion

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greenbelt from Woods of Westlake resident Wilbur Foster in the early 1980s but hasn't taken steps to rezone the land until now.

Sarah Campbell, a senior planner with the Parks and Recreation Department, said the costly and time-consuming effort to rezone the land wasn't necessary until the city solidified its plans for trail improvements.

Residents such as Cassandra Watkins, chairwoman of the Woods of Westlake Neighborhood Association, want assurances that the parkland bordering their neighborhood will be cleaned up and kept crime-free.

Watkins' husband, Don, was attacked five years ago at their home — which sits next to the trail entrance — allegedly by a drunken greenbelt visitor.

People from all over West Austin drive through and park in the Watkinses' neighborhood to reach the creek, because it's one of only two public trail access points west of MoPac Boulevard.(Loop 1).

The flow of visitors "can get pretty outrageous," Don Watkins

said.

"I've had to ask people to leave my back yard who were engaged in intimate contact. Some get belligerent when you ask them to leave. I've twice had people take swings at me."

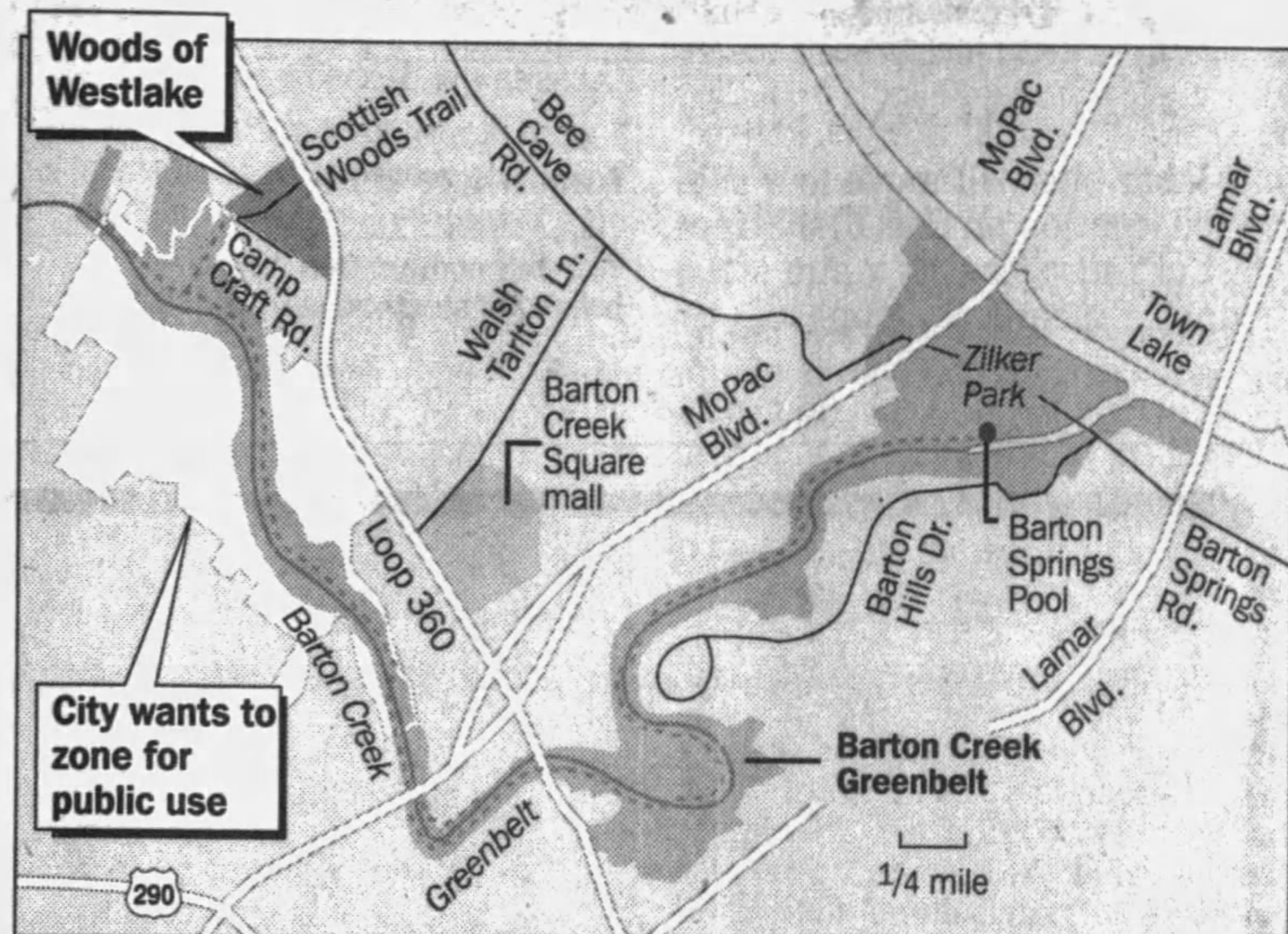
Police records show officers have been called 11 times to Watkins' address in the past seven years, and more than half of those calls were for vandalism or car burglary.

Parks Department spokesman Jim Halbrook said city staff, park police and citizen volunteers armed with cell phones patrol the trail daily, but the Watkinses say that's not enough.

"I definitely think that the crime is linked to the trail. The entrance to the Woods of Westlake should be immediately and permanently closed," said Cassandra Watkins, a 45-year-old caterer who has lived in her home on Barclay Drive for about seven years.

Said Don Watkins, "Given the amount of traffic on the trail, it's totally inappropriate for a neighborhood."

City officials agree. They plan to grant residents access to the trail



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closer to Barton Creek Square mall and close the path through the Woods of Westlake neighborhood.

Campbell said construction on the greenbelt improvements will start after the zoning change and site plans are approved and will be completed in the summer of 2000.

"I would hate it" if the city permanently closed the Woods of

Westlake trail entrance, said Kris Barnes, a Clarksville neighborhood resident who drives from her home to use the trail about four times a month.

On Tuesday, Barnes and her friend Janet Hampel said they like to hike the hilly paths in the area.

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