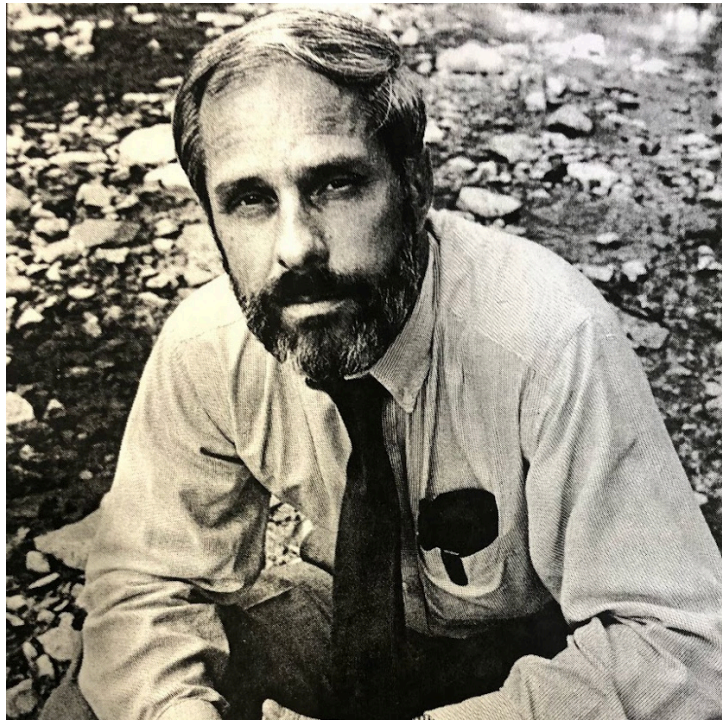


SETH SEARCY

1936-2013

Attorney
Save Barton Creek Association
Founding Member



“

“He was the kind of citizen who makes Austin a great place,” said former Austin Mayor Frank Cooksey, a longtime friend and fellow member of the Save Barton Creek Association. He just was relentless in trying to get things done to protect Barton Springs and the Edwards Aquifer.”

In 1979, Seth Searcy was among the founding members of the Save Barton Creek Association, which became Austin’s foremost environmental group. After activists spent years testifying about the effects that subdivisions, office buildings and other developments would have on the quality of the water that feeds Barton Springs, the group began rallying the public and pushing for an ordinance specifically designed to protect the springs. He was on the city committee charged with studying a new ordinance.

The ordinance was—to use the sort of bad pun Sarah Searcy said her father loved—a watershed moment in Austin’s environmental politics. It was the city’s first ordinance to explicitly take the quality of the area’s waterways into consideration and “laid the groundwork for all the subsequent work to protect the Edwards Aquifer,” Cooksey said.

Seth Searcy was amicable, understated and precise – cut from a different cloth than the successive generation of environmental firebrands such as Save Our Springs Coalition co-founders Bill Bunch and Brigid Shea, who in the early 1990s organized the civic uprising that culminated in the more sweeping SOS ordinance. But Searcy was nonetheless effective in negotiating the Austin politics of his day, and, in April 1980, the Barton Creek Watershed Ordinance he drafted with fellow Save Barton Creek member Ken Manning was enacted, Cooksey said.

-reprinted in part from an article by Marty Toohey, Statesman staff writer 9/13/2013

SETH SEARCY CONT'D

Remembrance written by Ken Manning, March 2020

Seth and I were the environmental representatives on the Council-appointed Barton Creek Watershed Task Force. There were two development representatives, David Armbrust being one, the other I do not recall. Neal Graham was the fifth member, not aligned with either side. The taskforce met for some months and came up with an ordinance that we adopted 3-2 with Neal siding with the environmentalists. Seth was employed by the state legislature as a legislative draftsman, so he was very comfortable in putting things on paper. Seth reduced to writing what the taskforce came up with. He was a delight to work with. We worked together seamlessly on the ordinance, as well as in our roles as active and founding members of the Save Barton Creek Association. Totally professional. I handled the political end of the ordinance and its adoption, lobbying the Council and generating grass roots support.

I was confident we could get something through the Council, but developers were lobbying hard to water down the taskforce recommendation. Our hand with the Council was made much stronger by the recent defeat of a water and wastewater bond package that the Zilker Park Posse/Save Barton Creek Association opposed because it would provide lots of water to new development in the Williamson Creek watershed. We beat it around 60-40. The voters had spoken that they wanted Barton Springs protected. The Council had to respect that.

I spent more time on the bond election than I did on the taskforce at that point in time, though the two meshed perfectly. So yes, Seth "wrote" the ordinance based on the taskforce discussions and recommendations. Was it the first Austin ordinance aimed at protecting water quality? Not really. The Lake Austin Watershed Ordinance preceded it by about three years. But the Barton Creek Ordinance was much stronger as there was much stronger political support by then at the council level for development limits to protect water quality. The Barton Creek Ordinance certainly set the stage for the later Williamson Creek Watershed Ordinance, the Lower Watersheds Ordinance and still later the Comprehensive Watersheds Ordinance.

