

district – Bentzin has never lived in EISD – agree that the issue then is a non-issue today. Howard's candidacy is supported by current and former EISD trustees on both sides of the political fence. In response to the attack ads, Howard's campaign produced a 1998 letter urging Republican voters to support the construction of a second high school. The letter was signed by George W. Bush's top advisers – Karen Hughes and Karl Rove – as well as Bush's current education secretary, Margaret Spelling. – Amy Smith

In other District 48 race news, Howard and Bentzin will appear at a **League of Women Voters forum** at 8pm tonight (Thursday) at the Lower Colorado River Authority, 3700 Lake Austin Blvd. Early voting in the run-off election ends Friday. – A.S.

Late Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks threw out the majority of a court case filed by four independent journalists against the city of Austin and Austin Police Cmdr. James O'Leary alleging **violation of their First and Fourth Amendment rights**. The suit claims that Stefan Wray, Pam Thompson, Mike Hanson, and Tim Jones – the first three known for working with Public Access Television and the latter for his environmental activism – were prevented from reporting the news and were victims of excessive force when blasts of pepper spray, either fired or ordered by O'Leary, hit them at a 2003 anti-war protest. Sparks threw out the First Amendment claims late Tuesday after hearing two days of evidence, and removed the city as a defendant; but at press time, the jury was deliberating the Fourth Amendment claims – that is, whether O'Leary's use of force was excessive. – Lee Nichols

Moving one step closer to enacting an **anti-McMansion measure**, City Council will vote tonight (Thursday) on an **Interim Development Regulation Ordinance**. It reads: "protecting the character of older neighborhoods in the City of Austin is in the public interest." And that character includes "appropriate scale and bulk of structures." The ordinance applies to neighborhoods platted before 1974, with older, overwhelmed drainage systems unable to handle added runoff created by larger homes' added impervious cover. A new home construction or rebuild would be limited to the greater of either a 40% floor-to-property-area ratio, 2,500 square feet, or 20% more square feet than the existing or pre-existing structure. For remodels, the same rules would apply, except instead of 20% more square feet, the ordinance stipulates an added 1,000 square feet if the applicant has been granted a homestead exemption. The council may waive the latter remodeling regulations if it determines that the rules impose undue hardship on the applicant; if the proposed development will not adversely affect public health, safety, and welfare; or if the applicant proposes safeguards to mitigate the effects of redevelopment. If passed, the measure takes effect on Friday and remains in force until June 6. The actual McMansion ordinance is expected by May 7. – Daniel Mottola

In other City Council news, council members gave their approval last week to a long-awaited plan to extend and complete the **Pfluger Bike and Pedestrian Bridge**. The "center arm" fly-over design extends from the unfinished bridge's western stub over Cesar Chavez. City Planner Greg Kiloh said the design is still being finalized, but that the goal is to make the Cesar Chavez overpass as short as possible and integrate the extension's path into the parkland below, where it would intersect with the anticipated Lance Armstrong Bikeway. The path crosses a new road at the edge of a large traffic circle just south of the proposed Gables development and proceeds on an easement through Gables land. Heading north, the path is designed to cross under Third Street and the rail line, emerging on Bowie Street. Kiloh expects design, engineering, and bidding on the bridge to take up to a year and for construction to begin in early 2007, with the underpass to follow later in 2007. – D.M.

Over the protests of parents, the AISD board of trustees approved a **2006-07 calendar** that begins Aug. 15. Citing e-mail surveys, the dozen-odd parents who publicly weighed in on the matter said that they speak for many more in advocating a later start date, and that the calendar committee that recommended the earlier start did so only narrowly, with a 10-8 vote. Many complained that the district is demonstrating clear disregard for their input. The trustees, however, pointed out that the computer-literate parents who were vocal on the issue are only one interest group in a district where 58% of students live in poverty, and that as trustees, they must also look out for the interests of "unspoken-for" children. For them, the earlier start means five extra instruction days before TAKS tests, which could make a difference in whether they have to take summer school or even repeat a grade. – Rachel Proctor May

In other AISD news, the trustees unanimously voted to extend Superintendent **Pat Forgione's contract** to 2010. In solidarity with his raiseless underlings, Brother Forgione did not get a pay increase, but he already takes home \$247,000 a year, so we're not too broken up on his behalf. In their review, the trustees praised the district for nudging test scores a little higher, but as is standard, gave suggestions for improvement. The list included further nudging on the test score front, equitable enforcement of discipline policies, addressing teacher compensation, and better responding to stakeholder concerns – an allusion to critiques that the district doesn't do enough to solicit or incorporate parental input. Ironically, the trustees said that same respond-to-folks-concerns thing last year. While Forgione's critics may not like it, the contract extension promises some measure of stability for a district about to face major upheaval after the May elections, when five of the nine seats on the board of trustees are likely to turn over. – R.P.M.

Capital Metro has opened a **new Park & Ride** in North Austin. In response to tremendous growth along north I-35, and the inability to expand the Wells

Branch Parkway P&R, the transit authority has built the Tech Ridge Park & Ride on I-35 between Howard and Parmer. The new facility is in the heart of the North I-35 Transit Oriented Development district, one of seven such districts created last year by City Council, and the only one not located along the Leander-to-Austin commuter rail line Cap Metro plans to build. – Lee Nichols

Two programs were announced this week to help low-income high schoolers navigate the road to college. Wachovia announced a \$1 million grant to support two agencies that work with low-income AISD students: Communities in Schools, which focuses on social services, and AVID, a college-prep program for low-income high schoolers. Also, the Sallie Mae fund, a private organization that connects high schoolers with private and federal student aid, has launched a \$1 million national campaign to help demystify college funding for low-income and minority students. www.salliemae.org. – R.P.M.

The city Resource Management Commission, which reviews water and energy conservation issues, passed a resolution at its last meeting directing the city manager to investigate the prospects of a **Texas Clean Energy Technology Park** and to report the findings to council. The park's prospective inhabitants could be firms working in solar, wind, alternative fuels, or biomass energy development. RMC Chair Adan Martinez compared the effort – designed to attract firms that research, develop, and manufacture renewable energy products – to economic plays made in the 1980s to foster Austin's semiconductor industry. Now, Martinez says that high tech industry, plus UT's academic presence, make Austin the prime place for clean energy technology to blossom. The resolution cited our country's crisis-prone dependence on foreign energy, the industry's contribution to global warming, and the city's stated objective of establishing a nationally competitive clean energy industry cluster. Given Austin's propensity for assembling and awarding huge corporate incentive packages (think Samsung), TCETP planners hope the city will be willing to open its purse to attract new firms and support local startups. – D.M.

On Wednesday, **Keep Austin Beautiful** held its 21st annual awards luncheon, recognizing those making a difference in the community environment.

- For its green efforts, including park and median renovations, Highland Park West Balcones Area Neighborhood Association won the Beautification Award.
- Southwest Trails and Greenways got a Community Involvement award for its independently built trail from Oltorf to Town Lake along Country Club Creek.
- Capital Area Master Naturalist's service-oriented certification program took home KAB's Education award.
- Dan Garrison, volunteer executive director of the Town Lake Trail Foundation, was recognized for his individual achievement.
- Tokyo Electron was awarded the Industry Leadership prize for its community efforts on local tree-planting projects, its adopt-a-street cleanups, and its early embrace of 100% clean energy.
- Community New Start won the Litter Abatement award for its cleanups and community celebrations in the St. John's neighborhood.
- Austin City Limits festival won the Recycling prize for its stepped-up efforts.
- and the meticulous trail builders with the American Youthworks Environmental Corps captured the Youth Achievement award.

See www.KeepAustinBeautiful.org for more info. – D.M.

BEYOND CITY LIMITS

February 1, Milton Rister was made director of the **Texas Legislative Council**, the quiet, administrative agency legislators depend on for drafting their bills, running their numbers, and much more. Big news, right? Actually, Rister deviates wildly from the nonpartisan tradition of the indispensable, yet largely unknown agency, raising fears the TLC will start playing favorites under his watch. An article in *Quorum Report*, disseminated on blog PinkDome.com and elsewhere, noted that millionaire James Leininger, a Republican school-voucher proponent, donated tens of thousands of dollars to PACs seeking to unseat Republican moderates who helped defeat vouchers last session. One recipient was Keep Texas Strong, which Rister owns. Rister is also a former Republican state party chair, and worked for Tom DeLay's Texans for a Republican Majority PAC. Rister was ultimately confirmed in a 9-1 vote; the lone nay belonged to GOP Sen. Jeff Wentworth. Democratic Rep. Senfronia Thompson, in a release on PinkDome, laments "Rister is a political operative. He has long and well-known ties to the Craddick and Dewhurst political way of doing business ... the fact that a partisan person is being put into this position is a foot on the neck of bipartisanship in the state of Texas." – Wells Dunbar

Kurt Musselman of the Burnt Orange Report political blog used the opportunity of the Democracy for Texas meetup at Mother Egan's last week to announce a new campaign – "**Draft Maxey Dot Com**" – intended to persuade former Austin state Rep. and Democratic consultant Glen Maxey that he should run for state Democratic Party Chair. (Current chair Charles Soechting has announced his resignation.) Maxey, who was in the crowd at Mother Egan's, didn't respond that evening ("He's absolutely going to kill me," said Musselman, as he unveiled the Web site) but reportedly is seriously considering the idea, and in the meantime, the new Web site – DraftMaxey.com – is busy drumming up support, and signatures for petitions to be delivered to Maxey, and recruiting potential delegates to the state Dem convention to help elect Maxey. "We can never hack through jungles using only a needle," reads the Web page. "We need a machete." We weren't aware of that translation of "Maxey." – Michael King

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