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Dear Client:

Multi-inch rainfall fell throughout much of the Austin area last week. The benefit is obvious when you look at the trees, shrubs, grass, etc. Vegetation is thriving now. But, emergency crews will tell you the dog days of summer harbor the potential for disaster. We're not talking about flooding, we're talking about wildfires. As the summer temps rise, dry vegetation provides fuel for fast-moving wildfires.

Specifically, we're referencing the northwest quadrant of Austin, lavishly graced with massive amounts of trees – especially cedar/mountain juniper. **Fire casualty companies have rated Austin #3 in the nation for high wildfire risk, with more than 37,000 homes at risk.**

Public Safety Commission member **Mike Levy says the Austin City Council chooses to ignore the critical, immediate need for another fully-staffed fire station in the Loop360 corridor.** “If a wildland fire pushed by high winds from the northwest is not contained at 360, there goes Austin,” Levy warns.

Pointing to recent widespread fires in California and Colorado, Levy says the heavily-wooded area of Austin along the 360 corridor poses even greater risk. **“We have massive amounts of cedar and persimmon,”** he said. **“Because of their oils, they don't ignite; they explode.”**

He envisions a scary perfect storm scenario: Thirty-to-thirty-five mile an hour winds that don't “lay down” at night. Low humidity. Very dry vegetation in large quantities serving as hot fuel. **“One home on the urban interface ignites, most likely by a flying ember under the eaves rather than direct contact with flame,** similar to how Bastrop homes, several miles from the actual flames, ignited,” said Levy.

“Then that fire igniting homes on either side and then on either side of those, with the same pattern across the street, with the fire jumping to the homes behind those ... **Well, you get the idea of the checker-board pattern of rapidly-spreading house fires,**” he continued. **“A monstrous inferno.** In less than 2-3 hours, thousands of homes will be lost along with lives of firefighters and civilians.”

Levy continues to press for expanded fire protection in Austin's northwest quadrant, saying **“Austin so far has dodged the bullet.”**

Is a wildland fire bullet aimed at Austin this year? Who knows? But a look at the long-term forecast can provide some insight. One of the keys is high temps, which can provide fuel for a wildfire. What do weather models indicate? Bob Rose is the meteorologist for the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA). This agency tracks climate for Central Texas, while monitoring weather effects on the area's water supply. This week Rose predicted the number of triple-digit temperature days anticipated throughout the area this summer.

Rose doesn't see an extreme heat impact this summer for the Central Texas area. But, he predicts **there could be as many as 35 days of triple-digit temperatures this summer.** Okay, how does this compare? Well, it is way below the stifling summer of 2011 when the thermometer hit 100-degrees or higher on **90 different days. Brutal.** For a short-term perspective, last year recorded 42 days of 100-degree-plus summertime temps.

Other factors playing into wildfire problems are wind and humidity. Can't predict those two elements. But you need to be aware that **low humidity and high winds can play havoc in this area if a spark triggers a blaze in our heavily-wooded areas.** Bottom line: keep an eye on the temps, and if the triple-digit, drying-out temperature situation occurs at a time of low humidity and high winds, this is a recipe for a potential problem. Stay alert.

While on the topic of potential disasters, it's time to remind you the Atlantic hurricane season starts in less than a month – June 1, 2018 – and runs until the fall. You don't need to be reminded of the havoc Hurricane Harvey caused this past year when it slammed into the Texas Gulf Coast. So, before storm news gets serious, take a look at the names that will be attached to tropical storms (to see if you, or someone you know/love/hate will be the subject of wisecracks about the storms.)

For 2018, here's the sequence of official names: **Alberto ... Beryl ... Chris ... Debby ... Ernesto ... Florence ... Gordon ... Helene ... Isaac ... Joyce ... Kirk ... Leslie ... Michael ... Nadine ... Oscar ... Patty ... Rafael ... Sara ... Tony ... Valerie and William.** Seldom has there been a season so active that all the names are used.

Don't know if you noticed the change in parking meter hours in Central East Austin. Effective this week, the on-street meters will now be taking your money Monday through Saturday between 8 am and 11:59 pm. These are much longer hours than in the past. The boundaries: between IH-35, Chicon Street, East 11th Street and Lady Bird Lake.

The City said it is extending the hours **“to increase parking availability and combat congestion associated with vehicles circulating to find parking.”** The City claims **“metering public parking helps create turnover so that people are more likely to find spaces.”**

As the Austin City Council looks for more and more ways to be California-copycats, it's good to keep an eye on what is happening out on the Left Coast. For some time now, Austin City government has wanted to be a national leader in green energy. Most of its initiatives involve moving energy generation away from fossil fuel toward alternative sources like solar and wind. So, it's important to note what happened this week in California.

It's not a *fait accompli* yet, but California this week took a major step toward becoming the first US state to require solar panels on nearly all new homes. The California Energy Commission voted unanimously to **approve a requirement that residential buildings up to three stories high be built with solar installations starting in 2020.**

This doesn't seem to matter to California leaders who are already facing the biggest housing affordability crisis in the nation. **The Commission still voted for this mandated measure that would add \$9,500 to the average cost of building.**

Widely reported, Austin is also facing a home affordability crisis – pushing more families into the metro suburbs. **And last October, Austin's City Council approved a measure requiring virtually all new homes and commercial buildings to be built "solar ready."** New regs require enough space on roofs to add solar panels, and electrical boxes have to be large enough to incorporate a circuit-breaker for future solar technology. California's move bears watching.

Texas has been ranked the Best State for Business – for the 14th straight year. This is no "throw a dart at the wall" ranking. It is the result of votes by hundreds of business experts – CEO's. *Chief Executive Magazine* just published its findings after surveying CEOs from across the United States.

Low unemployment has been a hallmark of Austin's economy for years – and it still is. And while it has given the Austin metro braggin' rights, a noted Texas economist is raising a caution flag for low unemployment in general.

Ray Perryman's observation is that it is disruptive to an economy to have too few workers to fill available jobs. Austin has not experienced this problem because there has been a massive in-migration of qualified workers to this area. They scarf up the jobs as fast as they are created. **But it is getting to be a problem, Perryman posits, in the cities where workers are leaving for greener pastures.** (And frankly, Austin has one of the greenest pastures around.)

Perryman also raises *another* caution for the future – **automation and other capital investments will reduce the need for workers.** While these changes free up workers, Perryman said "the challenge will be then equipping them to fill available jobs."

So you thought only Austin high-tech flyer companies were bitten by the merger bug. What about old-line Austin businesses that are simply providing basic services since long before “high” and “tech” were used in the same sentence? An example is the local auto repair business. Your favorite corner car repair shop, in many cases, may now be part of a large corporate entity.

Take **Ellis & Salazar** (they pronounce it “sah-LAY-zar”). It’s been around for more than a half-century in Austin. The automotive and collision shop is now part of **ProCare Automotive** and it has expanded to six locations. The latest ProCare acquisition, announced this month, was **Austin Motor Mile Collision**, with two dozen locations in the Austin metro area and eight in the San Antonio market with 230 employees. You get the picture. The grease-covered mechanics in these small area auto shops are now corporate employees. The times they are a-changin’ right in front of you.

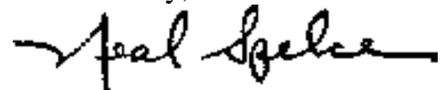
Speaking of changes, you don’t need to wait until the ambitious nine-gate expansion of Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) is complete to experience recent changes inside the original Barbara Jordan Terminal.

Barton Springs Dry Goods and **Ruta Maya Coffee** currently have locations at one end of the Terminal, at Gate 18. They’ve opened new locations at the other end, near Gate 5, just beyond Checkpoint 1. Coming soon will be a pizza place called **East Side Pies**. The thin-crust pizzas, using local produce and homemade sauces, will join **Amy’s Ice Cream**, **Flyrite Chicken** and **Hat Creek Burger Company** in the *west* food court, across from Gate 12.

In the *east* food court, soon to open in just weeks are three new concessions: **Hippies & Hops**, **Juiceland** and **Peached Tortilla**. They are in the final punch list phase of construction and are across from Gates 7-8. (And the ABIA passenger traffic keeps increasing each month.)

Dr. Louis Overholster says minor surgery is when they do the operation on someone else, not you.

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher