

Volume 23, Number 41

January 25, 2002

Dear Client:

The first day candidates may file for election to the Austin City Council is less than a month away and the filing deadline itself is less than two months away. Where are the candidates?

The seats currently held by Mayor Pro Tem **Jackie Goodman** and Councilmembers **Beverly Griffith** and **Daryl Slusher** are up for election this spring. All three have said they want to be elected to a third three-year term, in spite of the fact **the City Charter limits councilmembers to six years, or two consecutive terms**. But, the Charter includes a provision that allows incumbents to bypass the term-limits provision if they can get **5% of the qualified voters to sign a petition** to put them on the ballot. All three are seeking signatures as we speak.

All three were re-elected to their second terms in an election that saw an **abysmally low turnout of only 8% of the voters**. Of the 408,891 Austinites eligible to vote 5/1/99, only 34,211 bothered to go to the polls on that election day. None of the three incumbents had a well-known, well-financed opponent.

Interestingly, **far less than 5% of the qualified voters on that day voted for Griffith and Slusher**. And Goodman got only about 1,300 more votes than 20,445 (5% of 408,891). So you have the three incumbents out there right now trying to get as **many, or much more, signatures than they got votes** in order to bypass the term limits provision.

So, let's pose a "what if" scenario. Goodman, Griffith and Slusher have let it be known they want to run again. Usually when an incumbent says that, it **scares off would-be opponents** – especially those who realize it's almost always an expensive, uphill battle to unseat an incumbent. **But what if any, or all, of the three are not able to get 5% of the qualified voters to sign on the dotted line** by the filing deadline 3/20/02? They would not be able to seek re-election. Period.

Austin has never faced this situation in the past. And it could come down to the wire, because if Goodman, Griffith and Slusher are coming up short on the signatures, they are probably going to keep pushing right up to the filing deadline. If this scenario develops, you could see a **last minute scramble of wannabes jumping into a contest for an open council seat, or two, or three**. That's why we posed the question "Where are the candidates?" Shouldn't viable, solid, well-meaning, qualified candidates be getting a bunch of ducks in a row right now?

If you're interested in this Austin City Council election cycle, here are some dates you need to circle on your calendar. The most obvious date is Election Day itself – Saturday, 5/4/02. This is not to be confused with the political party primaries coming up in March.

As we mentioned earlier, the first day to file as a candidate for a position on the Austin City Council is Tuesday, 2/19/02. **The filing deadline is 5 pm, Wednesday, 3/20/02.** The first day of early voting (which is more and more important for well-organized candidates who try to get out their specialized, clearly-identifiable supporters) is Wednesday, 4/17/02. And the last day for early voting is one week before the election, Tuesday 4/30/02.

If you're one of those concerned with a grand strategy, just look out one more year. That's when the other three seats and the mayor's post will be on the ballot. So, within the span of just a year or so, **you will have a chance to vote on – or influence – all six of the council positions and that of mayor as well.** It's not too early to be looking that far ahead.

Texas Republicans are feeling pretty good right now about their prospects for 2002 in the Lone Star State. For the most part, the GOP's March primary will be a snoozer. The Republican Top Dog candidates will be able to conserve campaign cash and enter the fall General Election cycle pretty much unscathed. The opposite is true for the Democrats, and frankly, that may not be all bad for them.

Look at where the Democrats are coming from. Four years ago, they got their clock cleaned in Texas. With a popular Governor, **George W. Bush**, leading the charge, the GOP won every single statewide elected office in Texas. It was a big-time shutout. **And the Dems have now had four years to lick their wounds and get ready for another dog fight.** The Dem leaders planned to copy the GOPers and have a low-key primary. That didn't happen.

But, hey, Texas Democrats have always squabbled internally. While the Dem candidates for USSenate and Governor, especially, will spend a bunch of bucks for the next six weeks and say bad things about each other, it could **energize the party faithful for the General Election 11/5/02.** And, Texas Democrats really do need energizing after the demoralizing debacle four years ago.

There's no question the Democrats will be the underdogs in just about every statewide race on the ballot this fall. But a good **family scrap, with all the hot button issues being debated at the decibel level of a heavy metal rock band, may be just what Texas Democrats need** if they are to re-energize into a viable party in an increasingly heavily-Republican state.

The Dems are like a football team coming off a horrible losing season. The primary is Spring Training where they **bang up each other in practice and can't wait to sock it to the opponents in the fall.** But the opponents are coming off an undefeated season. Play ball!

Construction has been going on for so long on improvements to US183 you sometimes tend to forget that after it's all finished (will it *ever* be finished???), the mammoth freeway will stretch all the way from far northwest Travis County southeast to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. It'll be years before it's completed, but if you live or work north or northwest, in Travis or Williamson counties (and beyond), it'll be the best thing since sliced bread for your dash to the airport.

But, while the plans have long been in place, **there's still a question on when/whether the final funds will be allocated.** This is not an immediate problem because the money's in place for work to continue for several years. For instance, contracts should be let late this fall to extend the freeway east from IH35. It will involve building an **overpass at Cameron Road.**

And much further southeast, crews are already working at **Bolm Road to create an overpass and turnaround lanes.** That project started in November and will take away one of the slow points between IH35 and SH71. Then, starting in the fall of 2003, **bridges over the Colorado River** and the stretch of road to SH71 are scheduled to be rebuilt as freeway lanes.

However, the **other projects between US290 and Bolm Road are in limbo** at the moment. The Texas Transportation Commission put off a decision on allocating money for **overpasses and frontage roads at Loyola Lane, at FM969 (MLK Blvd), at Technicenter Drive and over Boggy Creek.**

Obviously these projects are essential. But, you've seen other construction projects that simply stop midstream when the funding dries up. Since highway construction through heavily-traveled urban areas takes forever to design and build, **now is not too soon** for the funding to be committed.

So, where do we stand on this? Well, keep an eye on the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO). **It should vote early this year on whether to bring these projects back** to the TxDOT Commission for another vote.

The US183 project, as big as it is and as long as it's taking, does not claim title to "Austin's Biggest Interchange" that is under construction. If you drive south on IH35 at all, you know the "biggest" title belongs to the interchange at IH35 and Ben White Boulevard.

Just how big is it? It's so big it will take 1,129 working days to finish the \$87,827,455.16 project. **That's burning money at the rate of \$77,792 a day to complete 49.63 lane miles.** The beams alone that are being used on this interchange, if laid end to end would stretch more than nine miles. The shafts, if laid end to end would stretch another 4.7 miles. Five bridges are being removed to make way for 15 new bridges built from scratch. Now you can see why the construction of this gigantic interchange has been impacting traffic for so long now.

Texas has a lot going for it as an economic center, but the accident of geography should not be overlooked or underestimated. Just as your personal health can in great measure be determined by having good parents, Texas' economic health is determined greatly by its location.

Texas central position on the US map means a company that does business nationally **doesn't require you to get up at the crack of dawn or stay past dinnertime** in order to work with customers on either coast. In the same vein, products can move by various means to nearly any market in the country with relative ease and speed.

In fact, it's a straight shot from many areas in Texas using the **efficient interstate highway system**, such as IH20 and IH40, because of Texas' central location. And, of course, you can travel direct from Mexico all the way to Canada, driving through downtown Austin, without getting off IH35.

Don't forget Texas' central location includes a lengthy coastline. **The Port of Houston processes more foreign cargo than any other US port** – in large part because of it's so efficient to ship product and raw material to and from Central and South America.

And airports, oh my. D/FW is one of the busiest in the US, George Bush Intercontinental in Houston is one of the fastest growing, Alliance in the D/FW area is the first US airport built for industrial use and Austin-Bergstrom is a model of efficiency for new airports.

Yes, Texas is in the "right place." But, smart Texans have taken advantage of this central location to make it a decided advantage for economic development.

Speaking of economic development, **Dr. Louis Overholster** tells the story of an Austin police officer who had a perfect place for his radar trap, so he knew something was wrong when one afternoon everyone was driving under the speed limit. He found the answer: a young boy holding up a sign that said "Radar Trap Ahead." What makes this an example of economic entrepreneurship is the boy's little brother was about a half-mile down the road, holding up a sign that read: "Tips!"

NEAL SPELCE AUSTIN LETTER (ISSN 1071-0612) is published weekly, except last two weeks of the year, for \$150 (plus tax) per year or \$249 (plus tax) for two years. To subscribe, call 512-498-9495. Periodical Postage Paid at Austin, TX 78767 by Austin Letter, Inc., 1407 Wild Cat Hollow, Austin, TX 78746. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Neal Spelce Austin Letter, P.O. Box 1905, Austin, TX 78767-1905.

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