

Alamo, Austin, and Lone Star chapters of  
the Sierra Club

Bexar Audubon Society

Bexar Green Party

Bexar Grotto

Boerne Together

Bulverde Neighborhood Alliance

Cibolo Nature Center

Citizens for the Protection of Cibolo Creek

Comal County Conservation Alliance

Environment Texas

First Universalist Unitarian Church of  
San Antonio

Friends of Canyon Lake

Friends of Dry Comal Creek

Friends of Government Canyon

Fuerza Unida

Green Party of Austin

Green Society of UTSA

Guadalupe River Road Alliance

Guardians of Lick Creek

Headwaters at Incarnate Word

Helotes Heritage Association

Hill Country Planning Association

Kendall County Well Owners Association

Kinney County Ground Zero

Leon Springs Business Association

Medina County Environmental Action

Native Plant Society of Texas – SA

Northwest Interstate Coalition of  
Neighborhoods

Preserve Castroville

Preserve Lake Dunlop Association

Preserve Our Hill Country Environment

San Antonio Audubon Society

San Antonio Conservation Society

San Geronimo Valley Alliance

San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance

San Marcos River Foundation

Save Barton Creek Association

Save Our Springs Alliance

Scenic Loop/Boerne Stage Alliance

Securing a Future Environment

SEED Coalition

Sisters of the Divine Providence

Travis County Green Party

Water Aid – Texas State University

West Texas Springs Alliance

Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation

Wimberley Valley Watershed Association

To: The Honorable Mayor and Members of Council

GEAA statement to Item #5 Regarding Disposition of Sales Taxes 8-13-2020

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and our 15 San Antonio member groups. (highlighted).

Although it is not the main topic for discussion for this agenda item, you are considering permanently retiring two highly popular programs. The Edwards Aquifer Protection Program is internationally recognized as a successful model of watershed protection. It was awarded the City of San Antonio's Sustainability Award for 2020. The Greenway Trails are widely used for transportation and outdoor recreation while protecting San Antonio's riparian areas. As of today, no source of future funding has been secured to continue these programs at their current levels.

GEAA has a very strict process for taking positions on issues because all GEAA positions require 100% consensus of the member groups. In January of 2019, when the prospect of shifting the sales tax funding first came up, our San Antonio member groups were asked to review the ConnectSA plan prior to meeting so that we could make an informed decision. We also consulted a transportation expert to look at the ConnectSA plan and consulted the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (EAPP) Scientific Evaluation Team to determine need for continuing the EAPP. During the subsequent discussion, folks very thoughtfully weighed the merits of the EAPP and Greenway Trails program against ConnectSA. After discussions with their boards and members, the groups agreed that the sales tax should not be shifted to ConnectSA. As for workforce development, no one even asked for our opinion.

We regret that you did not make the same effort to consider the merits of all programs as carefully as did the GEAA groups. There was a short staff presentation on the current status of the EAPP and Greenway Trails programs at a Community Health and Equity Committee meeting. However, you all have never had a presentation by experts that discusses their findings on the need for continuing the EAPP in order to adequately protect San Antonio's Edwards Aquifer water supply. We requested a B Session briefing by Dr. Ronald Green, hydrogeologist and member of the EAPP Scientific Evaluation Team (SET) and the National Cave and Karst Research Institute to present the recommendations of the SET. This would have provided scientific opinion to counter various statements that were being bandied about averring that the EAPP is no longer needed. Frankly, we can tell from the way you consider requests for rezoning over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone that you all do not understand the fragility and need to protect San Antonio's primary source of water.

We are grateful that Mayor Nirenberg met with us multiple times to discuss continuing the EAPP without the sales tax. After each discussion, however, the GEAA member groups considered the various proposals for alternative sources of

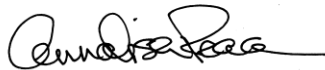
funding and still came back strongly in support of retaining the sales tax for the EAPP/Greenway Trails.

Regarding your approval to put the PreK4SA renewal on the ballot, we feel that the decision was rushed and premature. You might have considered how a full ¼ cent sales tax could have been divided more equitably between all these programs. Of course, if you had not put PreK4SA on the ballot, you would have ticked off a lot of big wigs. But, by voting for the ballot propositions that you are considering today, you are really angering a lot of citizens who strongly support continuation of the EAPP and the Greenway Trails.

The members of GEAA recognize that our community has many competing needs. Yet, we feel that proposals to meet these various needs have been put together in a slapdash manner without fully examining how we might best work together to make our city both sustainable and equitable. We propose that you put a two-year extension of the 1/8 cent sales tax to be dedicated to the Edwards Aquifer Protection Program and the Greenway Trails. This will provide time to examine other funding options for these programs, workforce development, and VIA – as well as time to flesh out proposals for shifting sales taxes to other uses if that is a preference.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. Please consider the Aquifer Alliance a resource that is at your disposal and feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annalisa Peace", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Annalisa Peace  
Executive Director

Alamo Group of the Sierra Club, Bexar Audubon Society, Bexar Green Party, Bexar Grotto, Environment Texas, First Universalist Unitarian Church of San Antonio, Friends of Government Canyon, Fuerza Unida, Headwaters at Incarnate Word, Northwest Interstate Coalition of Neighborhoods, San Antonio Audubon Society, San Antonio Conservation Society, San Geronimo Valley Alliance, Sisters of the Divine Providence, Green Society of UTSA).