



Request For Coverage: January 7, 2025

Austin Planning Commission To Vote On Gutting Protections For Barton Springs



When: Tuesday, January 14 at 6PM

Where: Austin City Hall, Council Chambers (Room 1001), 301 W 2nd St, Austin, TX 78701

What: The City Of Austin Planning Commission will vote on whether to initiate a variance request for the Save Our Springs (SOS) ordinance on the proposed Hays Commons Development

Contact: Mike Clifford, GEAA Technical Director, 512-426-4463 / mike@aquiferalliance.org

Austin developer Milestone is attempting to build a high-density development in a rural area on the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone (EARZ), putting Barton Springs and area wells at risk with potential groundwater pollution. The proposed Hays Commons development would insert the equivalent of a new city of 2,902 people onto an environmentally-sensitive tract near Manchaca where surface water flows into the Edwards Aquifer and in turn provides groundwater for local wells as well as springflow for Barton Springs. Milestone is requesting from the Planning Commission an amendment to the Save Our Springs (SOS) Ordinance to enable high impervious cover typically associated with city developments.

The Save Our Springs (SOS) Ordinance was adopted by the city of Austin in 1992 to protect the EARZ from groundwater contamination, with a strict 15% impervious cover limitation, based on recommendations by karst experts. Milestone wants a variance from the city to allow for 25% impervious cover, which would enable 700 homes on small lots as well as 13 acres of commercial development on the Hays Commons tract. They are also asking Austin to pipe 467,500 gallons per day of water to the development while sending 203,400 gallons per day of raw sewage back to the city for treatment and disposal.

"The SOS Ordinance was put in place to protect the Edwards Aquifer from overdevelopment" says Bill Bunch, Executive Director for Save Our Springs. "If the Planning Commission initiates this amendment and provides water to this area, it will be a catalyst for growth in the area and bring in unprecedented stormwater pollution."

Despite the proposed small lot sizes, it's notable that Hays Commons houses would still sell for an average of \$650,000, making the development unaffordable for many area residents. It is also notable that there is little existing road infrastructure to serve the development and no public transit options in the rural area where Hays Commons would be located.

"Hays Commons is a bad idea from a cookie-cutter Austin developer trying to pad their bottom line" says Hays Residents For Land And Water Protection member Darlene Starr. "They've proposed almost no environmental protections; it's all about how many houses they can cram into a pristine rural area."

The Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance unites 62 member organizations behind a comprehensive plan to protect regional karst aquifers, their springs and watersheds, and the Texas Hill Country. For more information, visit www.aquiferalliance.org