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February, 2004



# City of Balcones Heights

## Possible VIA referendum sparks controversy

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The Council discussed the possibility of placing a referendum on the May 15th ballot to determine whether or not to pull out of VIA at the Jan. 12th Council meeting.

A number of residents expressed concern that if the City drops VIA, it would jeopardize bus service to those who need the service the most.

Much of the discussion centered on whether VIA would terminate the service within the City limits and drive through the City without stopping.

"That would cause a great hardship on those who depend on the bus to get them around," said Freddie Jones, long time resident and retired VIA employee.

City Administrator Lanny Lambert suggested a number of scenarios to

include maintaining the current 1/2 cent tax and using it for economic development.

According to Lambert, "if we opt to pull out of VIA, the 1/2 cent tax could be used to build a new City Hall, Senior Center or Library. We can upgrade parks, purchase a street sweeper, repair the streets, or address drainage programs."

The Council decided to host two public hearings before deciding on the referendum.

Bexar County also recently announced that a proposition to raise the VIA tax an additional 1/2 cent will be placed on a November County-wide ballot.

See page 6 for the recap of the Jan. 26th public hearing.

### Mayor

**Jim Craven**

*Mayor Pro Tem & Councilman, Place 5*

**Bill Johnson**

*Councilwoman, Place 4*

**Lucille Wohlfarth**

*Councilwoman, Place 3*

**Melissa Castro**

*Councilman, Place 2*

**Steve Walker**

*Councilman, Place 1*

**Bennie Cass**

*City Administrator*

**Lanny Lambert**

## City gives its "heart" to seniors

The City wants to ask its Seniors, "will you be my Valentine?" If the answer is yes, then seniors are invited to attend the City sponsored Senior Valentine's Dance at the Convention Center at Crossroads Mall, Thursday, February 12th.

The dance will be held from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. and feature music from the 30s, 40s and 50s.

The three hour event will include Charlie Lopez, a singing DJ who croons tunes such as "unforgettable," and "as time goes by."

Coordinated by Councilman Steve Walker, the Council unanimously approved the event to acknowledge the senior citizens who have worked and contributed to the City over the years.

There will be food catered and the room will be professionally decorated by Emanuel Herrera, who decorated the stage for the Veteran's salute, November 1st. Admission free.

**Senior Valentine's Day Dance to be held, Thursday, February 12th, from 6-9 p.m. at the Convention Center.**

## Sign ordinances amended at the Jan. 12th meeting

City Council held a public hearing on sign ordinances that addressed among others things maximum height requirements in the "F" retail district.

Council voted unanimously to amend them in part to address concerns about businesses who utilized multiplex signs.

The controversy arose over wording in the sign ordinance that did not allow business owners of multiplex signs to simply

switch out names of new businesses on their marquees.

The current ordinance prohibited the switch and forced new businesses to comply with the current regulation that only allows a new business to erect a twenty foot sign.

With the amendments to the ordinance, business owners can now switch business names when old tenants move out and new ones move in as long as the ownership of the

property does not change.

A change in ownership of the property forces tenants to comply with the twenty foot sign ordinance.

The Planning and Zoning Commission also offered recommendations to the Council to enlist the City Attorney, City Administrator and Council for input on rewriting the ordinances in the future. Sav-a-Lot grocery and Wonder Plaza were businesses affected by the change.

## TexSan Hospital to mend broken hearts

TexSan Heart Hospital is open for business.

After an unexpected delay in construction due to a fire that was limited to the roof of the complex, the hospital is up and running.

According to Bruce Hoffman, executive director of operations, "despite the unforeseen delay we are pleased to begin service."

Thursday, January 8th, the hospital celebrated its grand opening to much fanfare.

During a 10 a.m. opening ceremony, Councilman Steve Walker, representing Balcones Heights, assisted four staff physicians in cutting the ribbon.

City Administrator Lanny Lambert and City Secretary Delia Flores were also present for the media filled event.

Guest speaker, Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff addressed the crowd and thanked the heart hospital and its staff for locating in the San Antonio area to service patients in the Bexar County metroplex.

At the evening gala, hundreds of invited guests were given tours of the facility by the staff.

Presentations by numerous staff physicians and CEO Trudy Land was followed by a large reception.

Mayor Jim Craven, Council members Lucille Wohlfarth, Bennie Cass, Melissa Castro and Steve Walker attended.

The TexSan facility is a 190,000 square foot freestanding three story facility built for 120 beds. The facility has:

- four operating rooms for cardiothoracic and vascular surgery
- Four fully digital cardiac catheterization laboratories
- Full service heart emergency center with physicians on-site 24 hours a day
- Rooftop helipad
- On-site community education center
- Ten-bed day patient unit and outpatient diagnostic services
- 60,000 square foot medical office building to be located on hospital campus
- Full service diagnostic radiology center, including 16 detector CT and cardiovascular MR.

**The Balcones Heights Newsletter is the official publication of the City of Balcones Heights. Articles must be submitted to Editor Steve Walker before the last day of the month. For more information, call City Administrator Lanny Lambert at 735-9148, at Ext. 227.**

### Free tree giveaway

Residents interested in a free tree, may contact Mayor Jim Craven at 735-9148, Ext. 235. According to the Mayor, "there is a limited supply of trees, so it is first come, first serve until supply is gone."

## Crossroads corrals Cowboy breakfast

An estimated 30 to 40 thousand enthusiastic would-be cowboys converged on Crossroads Mall, Friday, January 30th for the 26th annual Cowboy Breakfast.

Cars were parked everywhere in the City to include side streets, parking lots and access roads surrounding the City.

Herb Carroll, chairman of

the non-profit Cowboy Breakfast Foundation said Crossroads Mall was selected because of its easy accessibility.

In 1979 the first breakfast was held at Central Park Mall. It relocated to Far West Rodeo in 2002 and then to Sunset Station in 2003.

Cecil Lankford, event chairman says he hopes that Cross-

roads will become the permanent home of the Cowboy Breakfast.

The event featured 27,000 tacos, eight thousand biscuits and sausage sandwiches, eight thousand sweet rolls, eight hundred gallons of coffee and five thousand pints of orange juice.

Over five hundred volunteers showed up to help. Leftover food was donated to local shelters.

## State delays May election date by two weeks

Filing for this year's City Council election will begin at 8 a.m. Monday, Feb. 16th and end at 5 p.m. Friday, Mar. 15th at the Justice Center.

### May 15th election day

This year's election has been changed from the first Saturday in May to the third Saturday in May by state law. May 15th the polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Early voting will begin

Wednesday, April 28th to Monday, May 11th.

Early voting will begin at 8 a.m. and end at 4:30 p.m. each day.

This year, Place 1, 2 and the Mayor's slot are up for grabs on the May 15th ballot.

Currently those seats are being held by Bennie Cass, Steve Walker, and Jim Craven, respectively.

To be qualified to run, a resident must be a US citizen,

18 years old, have not been determined mentally incompetent, not convicted of a felony, have resided in the state for 12 consecutive months and resided in Balcones Heights for six months.

Candidate's packets must be filled out and notarized.

For those interested in serving on the Council, contact City Secretary Delia Flores at 735-9148 ext. 236.

## First brush pickup for 2004-March 29th

The first of three annual clean-ups is scheduled for the residential area in Balcones Heights for March 29th.

- March 22nd through March 26th (actual pick-up, Monday, March 29th)
  - No household hazardous waste
  - No appliances with freon
- All discarded items such as old furniture, hot

water heaters, appliances, brush, etc. must be placed at curbside in front of the residence to be serviced no later than 7 a.m. on Monday of the actual pick-up. No brush should be put to the curb earlier than ten days prior to the pickup.

Since the collection vehicles will pass down each street only once, pick-up cannot be assured if bulky waste items are placed on the curb after the above cut-off date and time.

## City statistics

submitted by resident Ralph Ruiz

According to the 2000 census, Balcones Heights has a population of 3,016.

It has 1,437 households, 708 families and 1,537 housing units. Of the 1,437 households:

- 27.2 percent have children under 18 years of age living with them
- 26.2 percent are married couples living together
- 18.2 percent have female householder w/ no husband present
- 7.7 percent of all households have someone living alone who is 65 years or older

### Population breakdown:

- 23.7 percent under 18
- 14.5 are from 18-24
- 33.1 percent are from 25-44
- 19.5 percent are from 45-64
- 9.2 percent are 65 and older
  
- Median income per household is \$21,452
- Per capita income is \$13,529
- 21.1 percent of the population is below the poverty level
- 18.1 percent of families in the City is below the poverty line
- Total population living in poverty is 23.6 percent for under 18 years old
- 15.2 percent for 65 and older.



Firefighters from L to R: Mark Kight, Garrett Daugherty, Rick Garcia, Captain Don Stephens posing on the roof of TexSan Hospital after an inspection. Photo by Fire Chief Ben Hoeffner.



Mayor Jim Craven speaks with Russell and Anita Campbell at the reception for Lanny Lambert. Council members Lucille Wohlforth and Steve Walker coordinated the event.

*Over 60 residents turned out to meet City Administrator Lanny Lambert at the 5 p.m. reception, held Monday, Jan. 12th, prior to a Council meeting at the Justice Center.*



From left to right: New Patrol Officer Sal Onofre shakes hands with Investigator Lee Powers as interim Police Chief Robert de la Garza looks on. Police Officer Ray Menchaca served as this year's "Blue Santa," for the Alegre del Sol apartments located next to the Comfort Suites. Left: Apartment manager poses with Officer Menchaca and this year's "Blue Santa" recipient.

"Here at Save a Lot, we are happy to be a part of the Balcones Heights family."  
 Mark Ahrens, owner

## Save a Lot opens its doors to the public



L to R: Council members Steve Walker & Melissa Castro pose with Save a lot owner Mark Ahrens after cutting the ribbon at the grand opening. George and Edna Moellering get ready to buy groceries. Photos by Lee Powers.



**Store Hours**  
**Monday thru Saturday**  
**9 a. m.-9 p.m.**  
**Sunday**  
**9 a.m.-6 p.m.**

## VIA hearing draws a large crowd

Twenty-five speakers lined up and addressed the City Council at a public hearing at the Justice Center, Monday, January 26th.

The Council requested the hearing to decide whether or not to place a referendum on the May ballot to opt out of VIA and use the 1/2 cent VIA sales tax for economic development.

The nearly 100 people packed the training room on the second floor of the Justice Center.

Residents and non residents, bus riders and non bus riders were allowed three minutes to make their case on the issue. Only three speakers spoke in favor of opting out.

Residents George and Edna Moellering, and Diana Ortega urged the Council to place the referendum on the ballot. Ortega suggested there might be alternative options to offer residents as far as public transportation.

Arnold Muniz who lives on Vivian Lane admonished the Council to find other ways to raise needed revenue. "Displacing bus riders is not the way to go."

Rodney Carr, director of placement for the six hundred students who attend Career Point Institute on Spencer Lane, said over 500 of his students ride the bus and it would be a hardship if VIA no longer provided transportation for them. He expressed concern that his school would suffer financially if VIA pulled out of Balcones Heights.

Sarah Teel, general manager at Crossroads Mall lauded the Council for their efforts in attempting to identify needed revenues for the City. She suggested that opting out of VIA might not be the

best solution.

Laura Zertuchi, a disabled bus rider who does not live in Balcones Heights asked the Council to reconsider placing the referendum on the ballot. "This would make it extremely hard for me to get around," she said.

Jose Torres who owns a nearby business informed the crowd that he employs a number of workers who depend on the bus to get to work. "It will hurt my employees ability to show up for work on time."

Rebecca Sheffield, assistant manager at the Villa Madrid Apartments at 700 Gentlemen Road, offered a survey her residents filled out to determine how many of them actually rode the bus. Out of the 219 residents, 78 were special needs cases who used the VIA Trans frequently.

Mike Alcoses who lives on Bobbies Lane and manages the Bonanza Steakhouse on Fredericksburg Road appealed to the Council to rethink their options before pulling the plug on VIA. "It will hurt my employees, period."

Other residents who spoke against opting out of VIA included: Toni Atello from the Woods of Brook Hollow Apartments on Hillcrest, Linda Harris from the Siesta Apartments, Ralph Ruiz who lives on Crestview, Henry Hannasch who lives on Beryl and David Sellers who lives on Gentlemen Road.

Clem Rocha who lives on Shadyview told the Council he wants to hear more facts. The next public hearing is scheduled for February 2nd.

The Council must decide at the Feb. 9th meeting whether or not to place the referendum on the ballot for the May 15th election.

## VIA statistics for 2003

Average weekday boardings (ons) are 2,751

Average weekday boardings (offs) are 2,586

Served by VIA routes

91 Fredericksburg Skip\92 Fredericksburg frequent

94 IH-10 Express

505 Basse Metro

520 Zarzamora frequent

524 General McMullen frequent

550/551 Looper skip

602 Crossroads/North Central Metro

604 Crossroads/University park Metro

VIA Trans registered client in Balcones Heights: 30

Annual trips into and out of Balcones Heights: 3,700

VIA Sales tax for 2003: \$491,606

VIA Facilities

Crossroads Park & Ride, 20 bus stops

## Sav-A-Lot grocery store a reality

The Sav-A-Lot grocery store at 4400 Fredericksburg Road is now doing business. The newest addition to the business community is at full speed. Despite a controversy with a sign ordinance the grocery store manager, Brad Williams, says "we are happy to be here and we look forward to many years of success. If we do well here,

we will expand our stores to other parts of Bexar County."

During a January 7th grand opening, Council members Melissa Castro and Steve Walker cut the ribbon. Walker welcomed the customers to Balcones Heights on behalf of the City. The store was so crowded during the day, they ran out of baskets.

## Career Point Day Care hosts ribbon-cutting

The Career Point Day Care facility opened its doors to the young children of Career Point Institute students, January 14th.

In a grand opening ceremony that attracted a large crowd, Congressman Charlie Gonzalez, Boxer Jesse James Leija, Sheriff Ralph Lopez, San Antonio Council members Joel Williams and Patti Radle, Mayor Jim Craven, Council members Lucille Wohlfarth and Steve Walker cut the ribbon, officially opening the day care facility for business.

Despite the rain during the ceremony, owner Larry Earle, Rodney Carr; director and Congressman Gonzalez addressed the on-lookers. Many former students were also on hand for the festivities. The Day Care accepts students children as

young as 12-months old to five year-olds who have not reached their sixth birthday.

Located at 571 Spencer Lane, the Day Care's hours are: 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and again from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. to reflect the hours students attend class. The Day Care will be open each week from Monday through Thursday.

According to Carr, "with a large percentage of our students with young children, it was practical to set up a day care facility on the premises.

"Since many of our students are from lower income brackets, they qualify for the state program Child Care Delivery Service, which allows them to attend school while their children are in day care," he added.

## Ask the Administrator

by Lanny Lambert

I am thrilled to be the new City Administrator for Balcones Heights! This little City is located in the true geographical center of the Greater San Antonio Area. With the new hospital, new management and activities at the Mall area and many new businesses located along Fredericksburg Road, this is a great time to come to Balcones Heights. I am honored to be selected as your Administrator.

I was raised in Abilene, graduated from Abilene High School, Abilene Christian University (BA) and Texas Tech University. (MPA)

I have been an administrator for 25 years and in City government for 31 years. My last assignment was Brownsville for the past three and 1/2 years.

My wife, Debbie (school teacher) and I have three kids: Nathan; a sophomore at Abilene Christian, Audrey; a high school junior and Philip; an eighth grader.

I believe in good customer service, highly trained and professional city employees and maintenance of the City's infrastructure. You deserve an efficient expenditure of your tax dollars and that is my assignment as Administrator. I have an open door policy and look forward to hearing from everyone. My number is 735-9148, Ext, 227.

Balcones Heights is a wonderful place to live and raise children. We will continue to see future growth and development because people are looking for a place like Balcones Heights to live and do business. **The best is yet to come.**

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## City Roster

City Secretary.....	Delia Flores.....	Ext. 236
Municipal Court Clerk.....	Yvonne Baez.....	Ext. 223
Asst. Court Clerk.....	Michelle Garcia.....	Ext. 224
Police Chief.....	Kenneth Menn.....	Ext. 237
Ast. Police Chief.....	Robert de laGarza.....	Ext. 238
Police Secretary.....	Gracie Lerma.....	Ext. 222
Detective Sgt.....	Joyce Pena.....	Ext. 232
Special Investigator.....	Lee Powers.....	Ext. 240
Dispatcher.....		Ext. 225
Financial Officer.....	JoAnn Vidal.....	Ext. 244
City Administrator.....	Lanny Lambert.....	Ext. 227
Mayor.....	Jim Craven.....	Ext. 235
Balcones Heights Justice Center.....		735-9148

## Upcoming events in Balcones Heights

- Regularly scheduled City Council meetings are held the second Monday each month at 6 p. m. at the Justice Center located at the corner of Hillcrest (3300 block) and Gentlemen Road. All citizens are invited to attend. Meetings are held on the first floor in the courtroom.
- Senior Citizen's Dinner will be held the 4th Thursday of the month at the Community Center, located at 107 Glenarm Ave. at 6 p.m. For more information, call Edna Moelnering at 733-8718.
- Senior Valentine's Dance at the Crossroads Convention Center from 6-9 p.m., Thursday, February 12th. Admission free.