

CITY

CONNECTION

Volume 9, Issue 10

July 2013

Calendar

July 2013

- 2 - City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m.
- 3 - Yard Waste Trimming Collection
- 10 - Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste
- 16 - City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m.
- 17 - Yard Waste Trimming Collection
- 18 - Planning & Zoning Commission - City Hall at 5:30 p.m.
- 24 - Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste
- 31 - Yard Waste Trimming Collection

August 2013

- 1 - Planning & Zoning Commission - City Hall at 12 p.m.
- 6 - City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m.
- 7 - Yard Waste Trimming Collection
- 14 - Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste
- 15 - Planning & Zoning Commission - City Hall at 5:30 p.m.
- 20 - City Council Meeting at 6:00 p.m.
- 21 - Yard Waste Trimming Collection
- 28 - Heavy Trash & Large Yard Waste

Submit requests for Heavy Trash pick-up before noon on Monday, the week of the pick-up at (936) 294-5796.

Visit us online at
www.huntsvilletx.gov for
more information!

First female retires from Huntsville Fire Department

Twenty-year career filled with true friendships, amazing stories

Mary Bitter has more memories of working as a volunteer firefighter than one story can tell. The first female retiree from the Huntsville Fire Department, Bitter has experienced massive fires, a wide variety of training and certifications, adopted pet squirrels, hard times and true friendships.

Most importantly, her 20-year career is a testament to the idea that the brotherhood which exists among those in the department is by no means limited to the men.

"In 1993, I was working at the Phoenix Workshop before it became the Phoenix Commotion, and I was looking for something I could do that would allow me to serve the community," she said. "I never grew up thinking I wanted to be a firefighter, but then I was reading the newspaper one day and saw an opening at the Huntsville Volunteer Fire Department.

"I sent in my application, and I'll never forget the phone call I got on February 15, 1993 when Fire Chief Joe French said, 'Come on in.' I was 38 at the time, and once I started, I wondered why I waited so long in my life to do such an incredible kind of work."

In the early 1990's, Bitter was the only female working for the department, which at that point was primarily staffed by volunteer personnel.

"When Mary came in, we were more of a volunteer department than we were paid," Huntsville Fire Chief Tom Grisham said. "There were no paid firefighters at time except the chief and the assistant chief, and we relied on our volunteers for quite a bit. In those days, our volunteers worked to raise money to fund the fire department and even owned some of its own equipment.

"Even today, we still depend on the Volunteer Fire Department for many of our responses – many times, they're the ones who are driving the department as a whole."

Coming into a field dominated by men, Bitter said she felt she would have to prove herself to those around her.

"I grew up with three brothers, so while being the only female in a men's department didn't bother me at all, I felt like I had to prove that I could be just as strong as they were," she said. "They never once made me feel like that, but I remember I nearly killed myself giving 150 percent to pull my weight and



Retired HFD volunteer Mary Bitter, third from left, stands with fellow firefighters Norman Langwell, Trey Lamb, Assistant Chief John Hobbs, Chief Tom Grisham and EMC John Waldo

show everyone that they could trust me.

"All the work paid off – I remember the first time Chief Grisham told me he would go into any fire with me, and he felt I was competent in my training. That was one of the biggest honors to know that."

Bitter recalls several instances where she proved herself to the other line firefighters, as well.

"I remember one fire in this historic house at Avenue J and 9th Street," she said. "Everyone was steadily fighting the fire, and all of a sudden they started yelling, 'Go get Chris [McGinty]! We need a hole right here!'"

"I took a pole I was holding, ripped out half the wall in front of us and said, 'Is that big enough?' They stood there for a second before yelling, 'We don't need McGinty anymore.'"

One of the largest fires Bitter fought covered 900 acres in the area of FM 980, when she and Firefighter Chris Mitcham were sent to try to stop the spread of the fire on one side.

"We took an engine to one side of this thing and ended up in a cemetery trying to put out some of the hot spots," she said. "All of a sudden, one of the embers caught on a bush on fire, and that fire jumped to a dead pine tree that I was only a few feet away from.

"I turned and bolted, just knowing that fire was going to roll over on me, and I remember Mitcham was already at the truck saying, 'Let's go!' I dropped my water tank and ran through the cemetery, jumping over grave markers until I got to the back of the truck. I covered my face with my coat and we were out of there."

See **Volunteer**, continued on page 4

Curbside Recycling available in Area #7 - Guidelines meeting July 18

City Council approved the expansion of curbside recycling to begin in Area #7 on Thursday, July 4, an area to include customers within Highway 75 south of State Highway 19, Southwood Drive area, the Graham Road area, Highway 75 north of Interstate 45, the Sumac Road area and Westridge Subdivision.

According to Esther Herklotz, Solid Waste and Recycling Superintendent, garbage pickup in Area #7 will be conducted on Mondays only, while recycling pickup will be conducted on Thursdays only.

Residents on the following streets received blue recycling carts on June 20 and will now be able to participate in curbside recycling: Bois D'Arc, Brookview Drive, Chimney Rock Road, Col. Etheredge Boulevard, East Mosley Lane, Emily Lane, Enfield Court, Financial Plaza, Forest Lane, Fraser Road, Hickory Drive, Holland Street, Krystal Lane, Mosley Drive, Normal Park Drive, Oak Drive, Old Houston Road, Parkwood Street, Pear Drive, Pecan Drive, Pineshadows, Ray Black Drive, Rice Lane, San Jacinto, Southwood Drive, State Highway 75 North, Sumac Road, Tam Road, Timberwood Lane, Trailwood Drive, West Hill Park Circle, Westor Road, Westridge Drive and Woodforest Lane.

The City of Huntsville Solid Waste and Recycling Division will hold an informational meeting Thursday, July 18 to provide information on the curbside recycling program and general guidelines.

All residents are welcome to attend, especially those in Area #7, where curbside recycling commenced on July 4. The meeting will be held at the Walker Education Center, 1400 19th Street, beginning at 6 p.m.

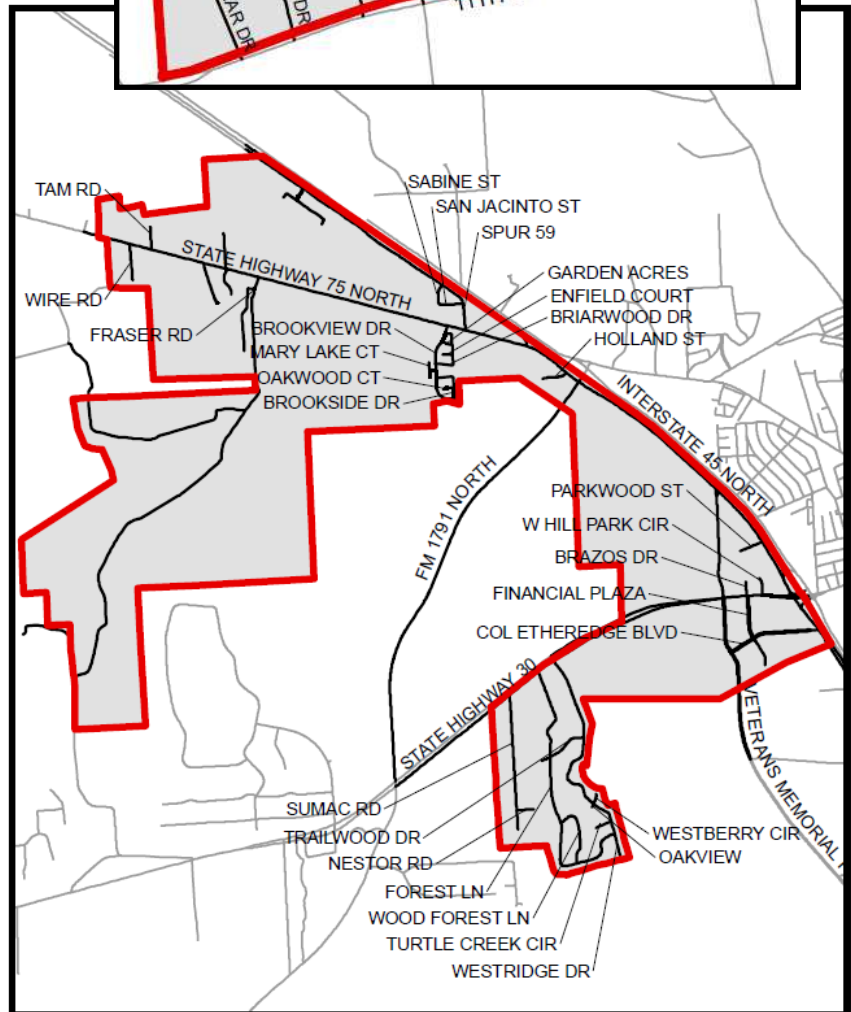
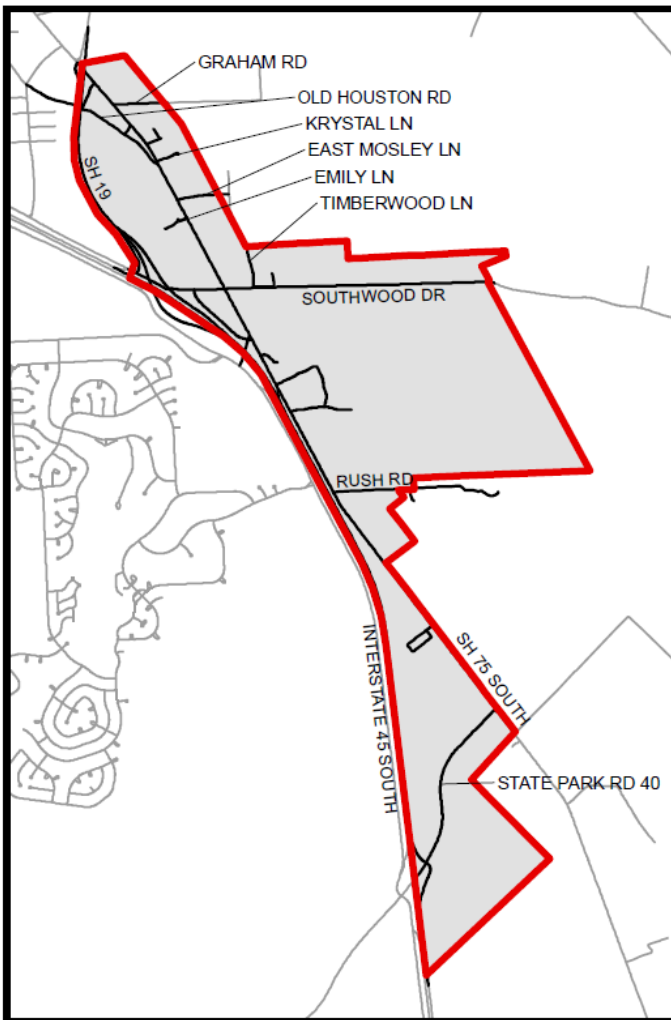
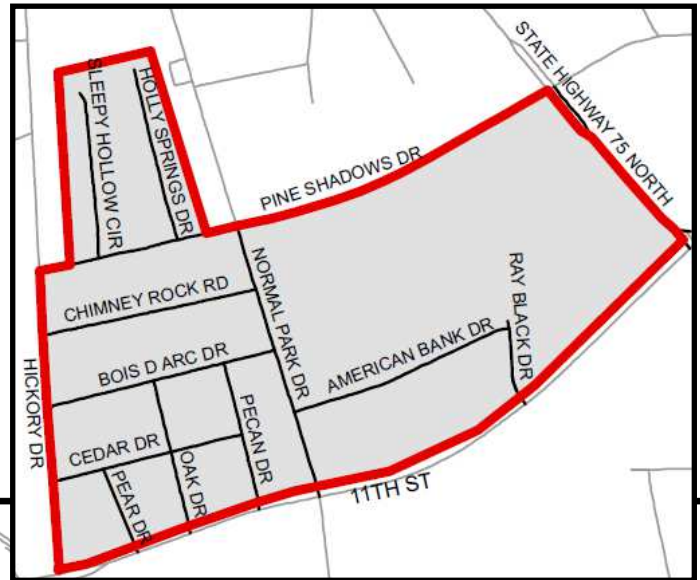
"During our recycling guideline meetings, I provide an in-depth presentation on why and how we recycle in the City of Huntsville,

as well as tips on what can be processed and how to prepare those items," said Carol Reed, Director of Public Works. "Attending one of these meetings is a great way to begin participation in a curbside recycling area, and we would especially encourage residents who are new to the program to attend."

Reed said the department holds two informational meetings each time recycling begins in a new area.

"We like to make ourselves available both right before an area begins recycling and right after, in order to answer any new questions and catch those who couldn't attend the first time," she said.

For more information on the City's curbside recycling program as well as details on Area #7, visit www.huntsvilletx.gov.



Hurricane Season: Information areas for family, home preparedness

The 2013 Hurricane Season will continue through November, and all residents are encouraged to review their emergency preparedness, family and household preparation and other safety measures.

According to John Waldo, City of Huntsville EMC, many of the efforts made to prepare for hurricane season can be applied to a host of other hazards and natural disasters, and there is ample information available to residents who choose to prepare.

“Hurricane season takes place from June through November, and you need to be prepared,” Waldo said. “Knowing the steps to take during a disaster – whether that disaster is flooding, tornadoes or hurricanes – can greatly reduce the danger and distress your family may face.

“Residents have a lot to consider during storm season – having money set aside, maintaining food and water storage, keeping the car full of fuel, having an escape plan, knowing what to do with elderly family members and taking care of pets.

“Above all, having a plan is one of the most important steps you can take in disaster preparedness. Knowing what to do and how to do it can help your family manage disasters with less worry, fear and uncertainty. Citizens should make sure their own preparations for hurricane season are complete.”

Family communications

Waldo said a key areas of consideration when preparing for a hurricane which is sometimes overlooked is family communication

techniques, especially those that can assist when cell phones are not an option.

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency preparedness Web site, www.ready.gov/family-communications, there are several tips to consider for staying in touch with family members during a disaster.

As the site suggests:

- Families should complete a contact card for each adult family member. Have them keep these cards handy in a wallet, purse or briefcase, etc. Additionally, complete contact cards for each child in your family. Put the cards in their backpacks or book bags.
- Identify a contact such as a friend or relative who lives out-of-state for household members to notify they are safe. It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town.
- Be sure every member of your family knows the phone number and has a cell phone, coins or a prepaid phone card to call the emergency contact.

Check back in future City Connections for more detailed information on hurricane preparedness topics including family care, food and water storage and supply, and pet care.

For more information, contact Waldo at (936) 291-5945.

Police/Fire: Stats for May 2013

Police:

Calls for service: **4171**
Accidents investigated: **98**
Animal Control
complaints investigated: **67**

Fire:

Calls for service: **116**
Main alarm calls: **15**

Get to know your City! Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter, “This Week in Huntsville”

If you'd like more information, sign up to receive our new bi-weekly e-newsletter, “This Week in Huntsville.” You'll receive regular updates, information about ongoing projects and special event dates.

Just visit www.huntsvilletx.gov, click on “e-News Subscriptions” in the left column, and register with an active email account.



Huntsville Downtown Farmers Market still in full swing!

Every Saturday through July 27

For more information, call Main Street at (936) 291-5920 or visit huntsvilledowntownfarmersmarket.weebly.com.

Charter review: Citizen participation welcomed

The City of Huntsville Charter Review Committee submitted its final recommendations to City Council in June, paving the way for public hearings, Council deliberation and potential amendments to be included on the November ballot.

The City Charter, originally adopted in 1968, includes guidelines by which the City is organized and managed, also defining its rights and privileges. Section 14.23 of the City Charter requires that the document be reviewed every five years by a Charter Review Committee, of which each member is appointed by the Mayor and approved by Council.

After the Charter Review Committee completes its initial review of the document – a process which can take several months – the public is given an opportunity to provide additional input before the Council votes to add potential amendments on the next regular election ballot.

The 2013 Charter Review Committee included Chair Rhonda Reddoch, James “Mickey” Anderson, Bill Daugette, John Escobedo, Maria McIver, Vanetta Mills, Charles Smither, Jr. and Mike Yawn.

Committee Chair Rhonda Reddoch said the process of reviewing the document – which began in February – started off with a thorough reading and discussion of current Charter elements.

“The first couple meetings we had were strictly to go over the existing Charter, and as we were going through, we tagged items we wanted to review later,” she said. “Before making any changes, we wanted to make sure everyone on the committee was familiar with the document, its structure and the purpose it serves the City.”

Reddoch said the committee addressed several areas of interest throughout the review process including City grievance policy, conflicts of interest and current organizational procedures.

“Once we picked the areas that we wanted to work on, we looked at policies in place in cities similar to Huntsville and on several occasions worked with City Attorney Leonard Schneider, City Manager Matt Benoit and other staff members,” she said. “Many of the changes we made were driven by the way the City is currently operating and the way the Charter is written – we found several items that needed to reflect current practices and State Law references.”

Overall, Reddoch said serving on the Charter Review Committee was a very eye-opening and complex experience.

“A lot of people in the community don’t realize the background of City operations and procedures, and I think we all learned a lot about what goes on behind the scenes during these four months,” she said. “The overall experience was excellent - we had a lot of diversity on the committee and a great representation of the different wards of the City.”

“I sincerely appreciate the continuous effort of all members of the Charter Review Committee and to City Secretary Lee Woodward. Both with independent research and unique viewpoints, our committee members brought to light many potential Charter amendments that I feel would benefit the City if included on the November ballot.”

With the submission of the Charter Review Committee’s recommendations to City Council completed, the next several meetings of Council will give the public further opportunity to contribute.

According to City Secretary Lee Woodward, City Council will receive public input on proposals for Charter amendments for the November ballot during two public hearings on July 2 and July 16, both of which are regular Council meeting dates.

Following the public hearings, the Council will consider proposals for Charter amendments during the July 16 and August 6 regular meetings. While there will not be a public hearing on the August 6 Council agenda, citizens will be welcome to make public comments at the beginning and end of the meeting.

Finally, on August 20, Council will discuss and potentially take action on an Ordinance to formally call an election for November 5, 2013, to include the finalized charter revision proposals.

“The Council has scheduled two public hearings for citizens to make suggestions on Charter changes, be they the changes recommended by the Charter review committee or other suggestions,” Mayor Mac Woodward said. “The Council certainly encourages and looks forward to full citizen participation in this process.”

“When all is said and done, this is not a Council decision – the citizens are encouraged to help us narrow down Charter amendments over the next two months, and they will vote on these items on the November ballot.”

For more information on the Charter Review Committee, contact the City Secretary’s office at (936) 291-5403.

Volunteer, continued from page 1

While there were some close calls, Bitter looks back fondly at many of her experiences while volunteering for the department, like performing rehabilitation on injured animals – some of which ended up becoming her personal pets.

“In 1994, a newborn squirrel fell into our truck bed, and I ended up naming him Popeye and taking care of him,” she said. “Well, he grew up and would never leave, so he lived with me, played with my dogs and even played tug-of-war with my dish rags.”

Throughout the years, Bitter has spent over 2,000 training as an Emergency Medical Technician, Public Safety Diver on Dive recovery team, Company 2 Rescue Company member and Safety Officer. Remarkably, she did all this while raising two daughters as a single mother.

“I always carried my girls’ picture in my helmet, so I always felt like I had them there with me,” she said. “It sounds corny, but

they called me their hero – after all, I was a single mother for my entire career except for the first six months.

“We had a system, though. When I’d leave the house in the middle of the night for a fire, I had a magnet by the front door that I’d slap on there so they’d know where I was if they woke up. We always found a way to make it work.”

Looking back, the names of many members of fire department who helped Bitter along the way stick out in her mind.

“So many of the seasoned firefighters I worked with who are now retired really took me under their wing – E.J. Hinson, Louis Parker, Matt Hannas, Charles Kilgore, Danny Coker, Johnny Kibby, Chris Mitcham and many others,” she said. “Chief Gisham, [Assistant Chief] John Hobbs and EMC John Waldo especially have been incredible friends for my entire career. When people say this group is a brotherhood, it’s true – every firefighter I’ve worked with, you don’t have to ask twice – they’re always, always there, and that’s a very special feeling. I must thank all for the incredible opportunity to serve my community.”