

# THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

<http://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2016-12-02/public-notice-on-and-off-the-rails/>

## Public Notice: On and Off the Rails

Debating a Downtown rail station, AISD land purchase

BY NICK BARBARO, DECEMBER 2, 2016, NEWS

**City Council** will take a couple of important actions this week that fall largely under the radar but could have major impacts. The first is fairly straightforward: an authorization to work with Capital Metro to establish "a **public plaza and a permanent downtown rail station**" on Fourth Street, and to begin the "process to establish two-way traffic" on Fifth Street. The station itself is a Cap Metro project – supported by a \$50 million TxDOT grant for construction, and to purchase four additional rail vehicles – but the street reconfiguration will fall to the **Austin Transportation Department**. The **plan they presented to Council's Mobility Committee in October** has two salient features: first, moving the rail station a block west from where it is now, and turning two blocks of Fourth Street into a **car-free transit and pedestrian zone** between Red River and Trinity. And second, making **Fifth Street two-way** between I-35 and Brazos – maintaining two eastbound lanes, but adding one westbound lane, essentially to replace the existing westbound traffic on Fourth, which is currently often impassible. As ATD Director **Robert Spillar** laid out the timetable, there will be a public process to explain the benefits and take stakeholder input, leading up to effecting the changes next April or May.

The second is a lot more speculative: Council will discuss two different items in executive session related to the purchase of five properties owned by the **Austin Independent School District** and **recently identified as surplus or underutilized** – most notably including the **Baker School** on 39th Street in Hyde Park. They'll then bring an item to the regular Dec. 8 council meeting, authorizing staff to prepare a bid for the properties, "for an amount not to exceed \$2,880,000 and other consideration including permanent affordable housing for families with children, providing housing in areas along high transit corridors, enhanced greenspace in park deficient areas as well as adjacent to schools and protecting natural drainage features and a spring." AISD has asked for "bids, offers, and proposals" to be submitted by Dec. 14.

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While the ongoing mediation over the **Grove at Shoal Creek** has precluded comment from any of the participants in advance of Council's special-called meeting on the topic Dec. 6, that didn't stop Idlewild Road residents Betty Littrell and Bennett Brier from firing off an irate **open letter to council members**, complaining that "For two years, all of [the developers'] efforts have focused on vilifying both the BCRC and those closest to the proposed development," and that "Sheri Gallo has dismissed our concerns as

well ... How can we trust her to represent our best interests?" See "[Grove Mediations Continue](#)" for more on the Grove.

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A very bad City Council election cycle for **Friends of Austin Neighborhoods** could get worse with a run-off upset by **Alison Alter** over **Sheri Gallo**. FAN released their final City Council voting record summary shortly before the November election. It was no surprise that the developer-friendly internet group leaned hard to the right, with the three GOP members topping their ratings (and **Greg Casar** as the only other CM with a passing score), but the FAN favorites took a hit at the ballot box, with **Don Zimmerman** ousted, Gallo facing a tough run-off, and her polar opposite on the dais, **Leslie Pool** (0% FAN rating), trouncing FAN founder **Natalie Gauldin** by the biggest margin of any race. See the full ratings at [www.atxfriends.org/austin-city-council-voting-record](http://www.atxfriends.org/austin-city-council-voting-record).

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**Heart of the City** is a gala benefit for one of our favorite local service charities, the **SIMS Foundation**, featuring "a remarkable lineup of performers sharing ... a behind-the-curtain glimpse of legends we have lost – like Bowie, Prince, Merle, Selena – through anecdotes and song." There's a truly all-star lineup directed by the very great **Adrian Quesada**, with emcee **Joe Nick Patoski**. Sat., Dec. 3 at Emo's, 2015 E. Riverside; \$50, or \$125 VIP; info at [www.simsfoundation.org](http://www.simsfoundation.org).

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The **SOS Holiday Party and Silent Auction** always has a special local focus – local tamales, local beer, local music – and this year, they're donating 10% of all silent auction proceeds to the **Austin Independent Business Alliance**. Friday, Dec. 2, 6pm-midnight at the American Legion Charles Johnson House, 404 Atlanta St. Suggested donation of \$10 supports the Save Our Springs Alliance, and gets you a \$10 gift certificate to Whole Earth Provision Company.

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**Clothing and housewares recycling** is now a new free component of **curbside recycling** for Austin Resource Recovery customers, as of Dec. 5. Many types of clothing and housewares – "including shoes, accessories, fabric scraps, stuffed toys, linens, tools, toys, hats, purses, kitchenware, and books" – will be repurposed or recycled through a private company, Simple Recycling. See more info at [www.austinrecycles.com](http://www.austinrecycles.com).

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## FAN Rating

Troxclair 100%

Gallo 88%

Zimmerman 75%

Casar 67%

Adler 56%

Garza 56%

Kitchen 11%

Houston 0%

Tovo 0%

Pool 0%

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