

September 24, 2018

Members of the Austin Neighborhoods Council;
Leaders of Austin's Neighborhood Associations:

An Open Letter Regarding "ANC Membership and Leadership"

The Windsor Park Neighborhood Association (WPNA), on September 8, 2018, after several months of deliberation, has reluctantly but with purpose decided to send this communique of concern to the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC), especially as it relates to WPNA's continued membership of 36 years - since its formation - in ANC.

WPNA recognizes:

- In 1973, ANC was formed to enable the collective association of all neighborhood associations in Austin with the purpose of "acting as a coordinating body and otherwise promoting and supporting the work of all neighborhood groups to the betterment of our community" (paraphrased) as represented in its bylaws.
- ANC was formed as a non-profit, democratic organization.
- ANC was originally and remains formed with the purpose to enjoin and represent the collective interests of all duly formed neighborhood associations.
- ANC has overall been a positive force of change throughout its decades of influence in the business and affairs of the City of Austin and beyond, including enabling and preparing some to be elected into leadership positions in our community.
- Democracy, by its very nature, involve association of individual qualifying constituency members that will not always be in agreement, full or otherwise.
- WPNA has maintained membership in ANC in support of ANC's purpose for 36 years.

However, the ANC seems to have wandered from its original aim to represent its collective membership. Recent actions by ANC have concerned WPNA especially as it relates to ANC membership criteria and methodologies. WPNA Asserts:

- Denying member organizations membership in ANC because they don't agree with all of ANC's actions or adopted policies, is spurious at best, and does not fit nor support the ideals of a representative democracy.
- Providing an organization denied membership the right to appeal its denied membership application to the general membership could be considered admirable, yet democracy should be inclusive rather than exclusive, and any removal of participative membership should be a high bar, and membership requirements should be simply stated and open to all - as it was prior to this change.
- ANC has departed from being the voice of its constituent members, instead concentrating on the concerns of a few. This is further exacerbated by a top-down structure, where decisions are made by the Executive Team and the membership is exhorted to support its decisions. There is little to no solicitation of opinion, or true debate. This focus has

limited the issues that the ANC has addressed, so that many issues important to many member neighborhoods, such as schools and the bond election, have been neglected.

- The ANC has become increasingly opaque in its operations, refusing to share information even with its membership. Executive Committee minutes have not been posted for months, and even requests for membership lists are denied. If members are to work with each other and the Executive Committee, openness is necessary. Secrecy only encourages the perception that the ANC is simply a tool for the Executive Committee to use for its own political means.
- Even Lady Bird Johnson suggested that democracy by its very nature is a clash of ideas - a noisy and messy business - requiring all to work towards compromise.

WPNA believes that for ANC to truly be the democratic representative of all neighborhood associations, as broadly outlined and stipulated in its Purpose and Bylaws, the following needs to occur:

- First and foremost, reinstate automatic membership based on specific enumerated criteria. We oppose the recent Bylaws change that gives the Executive Committee the ability to deny membership based upon its interpretation of an organization's agreement with unwritten - or even written - core values.
- ANC must adhere to its own bylaws regarding member organizations. Each member organization must actually meet the full set of enumerated membership requirements. Member organizations must have announced public meetings and published agendas/minutes, and must have at least the minimum number of members as stated in the ANC bylaws.
- ANC should also adhere to its bylaws in publishing executive committee minutes in a timely manner. It should make every effort to increase transparency of operations and members.
- ANC needs to reassess the current relationship between the Executive Committee and the membership, providing more opportunity for the membership to decide what issues to address and how to address them, instead of setting the agenda and the preferred solutions at the Executive Team level for the membership to support without meaningful input. Sector representatives should be selected by those members represented, and said representatives should have regular meetings with their represented associations. The ANC should seek true solicitation of positions and issues to remedy this backward, top down, dynamic.

Therefore WPNA wishes it to be known that:

- WPNA has lost faith in the capability of recent ANC leadership to lead ANC as stated in its purpose and guided by its bylaws; yet:
- WPNA is hopeful that ANC can return to its roots of inclusive representation of all neighborhood associations.
- WPNA fully supports the stated purpose of ANC - a purpose that has broad ideals of inclusivity and representation for all, allowing for dissent and discussion.
- **WPNA has decided to cease automatically renewing its membership in the ANC, effective January 1, 2019. Continued membership will require an affirmative vote of**

its membership, and will be judged upon the ANC's response to the issues brought forth in this letter.

Make no mistake. This has not been an easy decision. The members of WPNA remain conflicted between continuing membership in an organization that is no longer fairly inclusive against WPNA's history of membership in an organization with a long history of inclusive representation of concerns of all neighborhood associations.

We hope that ANC will return to its roots and that others will carry their concerns regarding issues of constitutional import to the elected representatives of ANC. Should ANC continue on its recent insular path, it will likely find itself relegated to a place of easily marginalized influence in the community politic.

Strength comes from diversity, inclusiveness, and representation of all our community's members.

With best regards,

SIGNED BY

Meghan Dougherty,
President, WPNA