

Our Stories: Secrets and Silence



By Dr. Rosalee Martin

(VILLAGER) - Family secrets have a way of taking on a life of their own. They become emotional burdens carried from one generation to the next, often shaping lives in ways that are unseen but deeply damaging. Secrets can drain energy, diminish hope, silence dreams, and prevent people from living fully.

Families often establish spoken or unspoken rules that certain matters are never discussed—either within the family or outside of it. These secrets may involve a loved one who is struggling with addiction, mental illness, incarceration, HIV, being gay or sexual abuse. They may also involve abortion, domestic violence, or other experiences surrounded by shame and stigma. Fear of judgment often keeps individuals from seeking the help, support, and healing they need.

Living under the weight of secrecy can take a tremendous toll. While not everyone experiences the same effects, prolonged silence may contribute to anxiety, depression, unhealthy relationships,

the inability to trust others, substance misuse, low self-esteem, and poor physical and emotional health. Many survivors internalize the painful belief that they were somehow responsible or unworthy of protection.

Secrets can keep people trapped in denial, preventing them from becoming all they are capable of being. This is especially heartbreaking when the secret involves childhood sexual abuse. Children who are abused are often told to remain silent to protect the family or the abuser. Fear, confusion, and the desire to be loved leave many children carrying emotional wounds for years, sometimes decades.

Breaking a family secret is rarely easy. Those who speak out may be labeled disloyal or accused of betraying the family. Women and girls frequently carry a disproportionate burden of family secrets. They are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and domestic violence and are often blamed when they disclose their experiences. Women who become pregnant may bear the emotional, physical, and social consequences alone, while the men involved may remain anonymous and unaffected. Too often, girls who have been abused are led to believe they somehow invited the abuse, causing many to bury painful memories in an effort to protect themselves and their families.

Silence may protect a secret, but it rarely protects the person carrying it. Healing begins when individuals are given permission to speak their truth in safe and supportive environments. Whether through trusted family members, counselors, clergy, support groups, or mental health professionals, sharing painful experiences can be the first step toward freedom and improved mental health.

No family is perfect. Every family has struggles. The strongest families are not those without prob-

lems but those willing to face them with honesty, compassion, accountability, and love. When we replace secrecy with truth and silence with healing conversations, we make room for hope, restoration, and healthier generations to come.

The habits we learn in our families often shape how we engage with the larger community. When individuals grow up believing that difficult truths must be hidden, that loyalty means remaining silent, or that confronting wrongdoing is a betrayal, those lessons can extend beyond the home. They may become reluctant to challenge unethical behavior in the workplace, report corruption, question those in authority, or speak out against injustice in their communities. A healthy democracy depends upon citizens who value honesty, transparency, and accountability. While protecting a person’s privacy is important, concealing abuse, corruption, or harmful behavior undermines trust and weakens the social fabric. Breaking unhealthy patterns of secrecy helps individuals develop the courage to speak truth with integrity, strengthening not only their families but also their civic and political lives. Communities flourish when people have the courage to speak honestly, confront wrongdoing, and work for the common good while knowing there will not be any negative consequences.

As our nation approaches another election season, let us remember that the right to vote was secured through the sacrifice, perseverance, and courage of generations who refused to remain silent in the face of injustice. We honor that legacy each time we cast an informed ballot. Voting is more than a civic duty; it is an affirmation that truth matters, that accountability matters, and that every voice has value. Let us replace destructive silence with courageous truth—in our families, our communities, and at the ballot box.

City Council Delays Vote on Anti Displacement Fund — East Austin Residents Call It a Stall

By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager



(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin’s long promised **Anti Displacement Fund**, designed to help residents stay in their homes amid rapid redevelopment, has hit another delay — and East Austin residents are calling it what they see it: a stall.

The fund, first proposed in 2022 as part of the city’s **Project Connect transit expansion**, was meant to channel millions into housing stabilization, property tax relief, and tenant protections for neighborhoods most vulnerable to gentrification. But at last week’s City Council meeting, members voted to **postpone action until August**, citing unresolved questions about oversight and spending priorities. For residents of East Austin’s historic Black and Latino neighborhoods, the delay feels like déjà vu.

•**A Fund Years in the Making**

The Anti Displacement Fund was conceived as a safeguard against the unintended consequences of Austin’s transit invest-

ments. When voters approved Project Connect in 2020, they also endorsed a **\$300 million anti displacement commitment** — a promise that the city would invest in affordable housing and community stabilization near new rail and bus lines.

Four years later, only a fraction of that money has been spent. City staff say they need clearer direction from Council on how to allocate the remaining funds, which could total **\$200 million or more** over the next decade. The proposed framework includes grants for community land trusts, home repair programs, and rental assistance — but disagreements over who should administer the funds have slowed progress.

•**Council’s Reasoning , Residents’ Frustration**

Council members defending the delay argue that the fund’s structure must be “transparent and accountable” before any money is released. Mayor *Kirk Watson* said the post-

Meanwhile, the **Urban Renewal Board** — which oversees legacy land tracts in East Austin — has urged Council to release at least partial funding to support community land trusts already approved by voters.

•**Next Steps**

Council is expected

to revisit the item in August, after staff present revised spending guidelines and potential oversight models. Advocates say they’ll keep pressing for immediate action — and for accountability when the vote finally arrives.

For East Austin residents, the stakes are

clear. The Anti Displacement Fund represents not just a policy promise, but a test of whether Austin’s growth can co-exist with justice. As one speaker put it during the meeting: “If the city can move mountains for developers, it can move a vote for the people who built this community.”

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