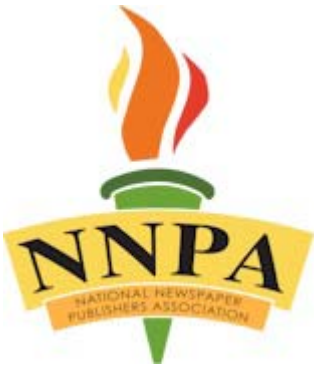




RAPPIN'
Thomas Wyatt

Different
Strokes

Community outrage has surged this summer after two Black teenagers suspiciously drowned while accompanied by White peers, with many residents describing the incidents as painful reminders of long standing racial inequities in safety, accountability, and public concern. Across both communities, families, neighbors, and local advocates are expressing deep frustration at what they view as slow, inconsistent, or insufficient responses from authorities. The grief is compounded by a sense that the circumstances surrounding the drownings were treated too casually, without the urgency or scrutiny that many believe would have been applied had the racial demographics been reversed.

In vigils, town halls, and social media campaigns, community members are demanding full transparency about the events leading up to each death, including who was present, what supervision existed, and how quickly help was sought. Many residents argue that the narratives offered so far feel incomplete or dismissive, leaving families to shoulder not only their loss but also the burden of pushing for answers. The fact that both teens were with White peers at the time has intensified calls for a thorough investigation, with some activists noting a pattern in which Black youth deaths are too quickly labeled “accidents” without deeper inquiry into context, responsibility, or potential negligence.

Local leaders, clergy, and youth organizers have emphasized that the outrage is not only about these two tragedies but about a broader climate in which Black children are often less protected, less believed, and less prioritized. They are urging officials to treat the drownings as community crises requiring sustained attention, not isolated summer incidents. In both neighborhoods, the teens are being remembered as vibrant, promising young people whose lives were cut short under circumstances that demand clarity, accountability, and systemic change.

Legacy Under Siege

HISTORIC BLACK HOMEOWNERS FACE AGGRESSIVE
BUYOUT TACTICS NEAR 12TH & CHICON



Legacy residents describe pressure campaigns, misleading offers,
and relentless investor outreach as East Austin land values soar.

by Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(EAST AUSTIN) - For decades, Black families living around the 12th and Chicon corridor have sustained one of East Austin’s most culturally rooted and historically significant neighborhoods. Today, many of those same households say they are facing a new and deeply unsettling reality: a surge of aggressive buyout tactics from investors seeking to capitalize on rapidly rising land values. Residents describe a steady stream of unsolicited phone calls, repeated knocks at the door, and letters promising “fast cash” if they agree to sell immediately. What investors present as opportunity feels, to many families, like a coordinated pressure campaign aimed at separating them from homes that have anchored their lives for generations.

The tactics, residents say, are not isolated. They reflect a broader pattern of displacement that has reshaped East Austin over the past decade, as redevelopment accelerates and property values soar far beyond what longtime homeowners originally paid. Many families now find themselves navigating rising taxes, escalating maintenance costs, and persistent solicitation from buyers who frame selling as the only sensible option. Community leaders warn that these tactics amount to a modern form of extraction—one that threatens to erase the last concentrated pock-

ets of Black homeownership in a neighborhood that once served as a refuge from segregation and exclusion.

Homeowners recount receiving multiple offers from different companies within the same week, some using language that implies urgency or impending financial risk. Elderly residents report being approached directly, sometimes without family present, and being told their homes are “too old to maintain” or “too expensive to keep.” Others say representatives have suggested that the market is about to shift and that selling now is the only way to avoid future hardship. Housing advocates argue that these approaches disproportionately target households with limited access to legal or financial guidance, leaving families vulnerable to predatory persuasion at a moment when stability is already under strain.

Across the neighborhood, frustration is growing. Residents say the pressure campaigns do not simply threaten individual households—they threaten the cultural continuity of a community that has already endured decades of displacement. As investor interest intensifies, families who want to remain in place are calling for stronger protections, clearer oversight, and a public acknowledgment of what is at stake: not just property, but history, identity, and the right to remain rooted in a place their families helped build.

INSIDE



AISSD students set to
walk the “Gap Mile” to
school due to funding.
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Yet another vote
delayed for the Anti-
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Data Centers become
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Texans on both
sides of the isle.
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http://austintexas.gov/covid19

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SELF-ASSESSMENT | STAY HOME ORDERS | HEALTH PROVIDERS | CARE

ER Wait Times Surge

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - For East Austin residents, a trip to the emergency room increasingly means hours of waiting — sometimes entire nights — before seeing a doctor. As hospitals across the region expand their facilities westward, community advocates and health care workers say the city's east side is being left behind, deepening inequities that have long defined Austin's health landscape.

At St. David's and Dell Seton, patients from East Austin report average ER wait times exceeding five hours, according to recent state health data and patient accounts. Meanwhile, new hospital wings and urgent care centers are opening in West Austin and suburban areas like

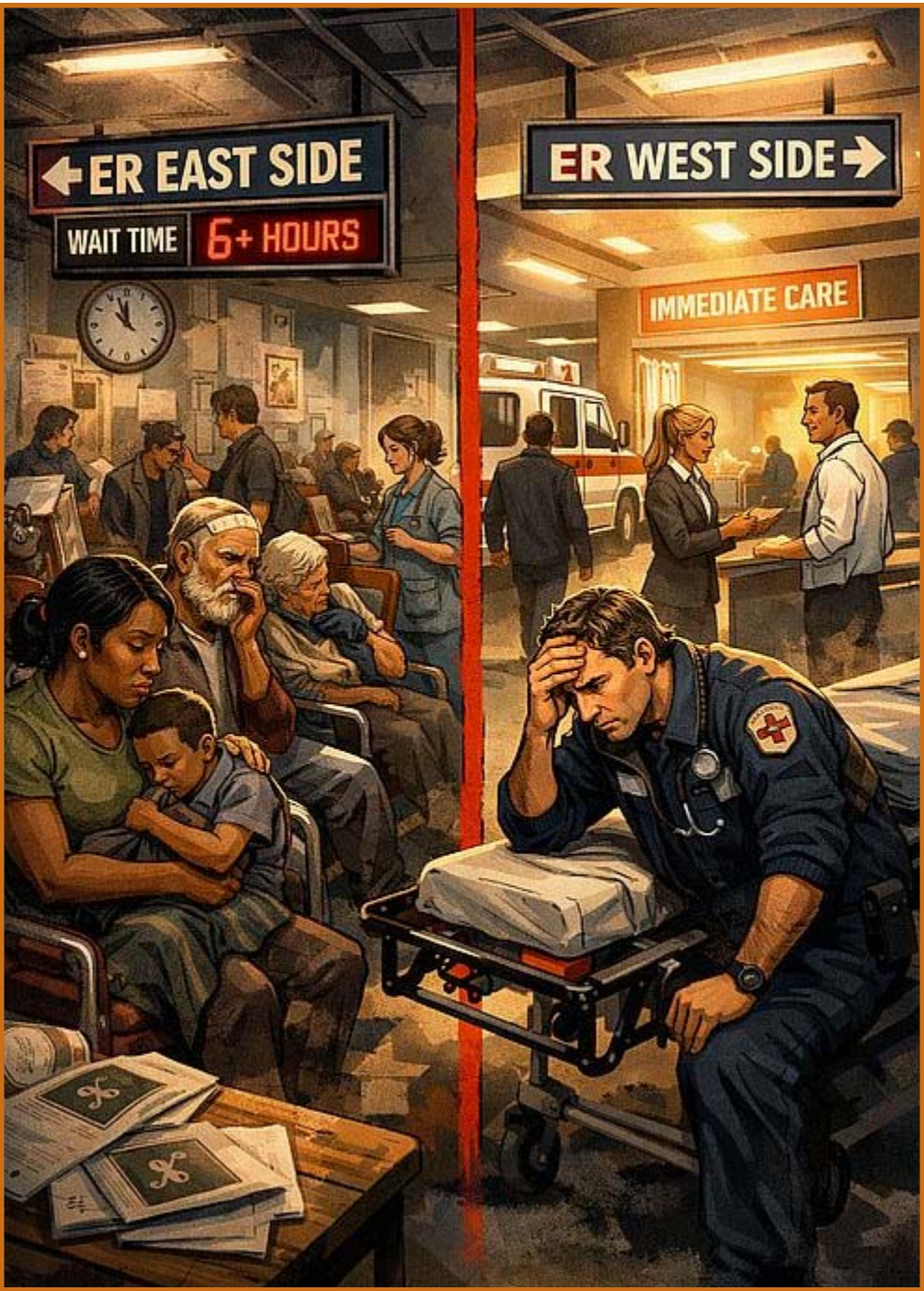
Bee Cave and Lakeway, where median incomes are far higher and insurance coverage rates stronger. The imbalance, critics argue, is not accidental — it reflects a pattern of investment that prioritizes profitability and private insurance over proximity and need.

Hospital administrators acknowledge the strain but attribute it to staffing shortages and rising patient volumes citywide. Yet nurses and paramedics working in East Austin say the problem is structural: emergency departments serving lower income neighborhoods are under resourced, while expansion projects follow the money westward. "We're seeing ambulances rerouted because there simply aren't enough beds open," said one ER nurse who requested

anonymity. "It's not just inconvenient — it's dangerous."

Community leaders are calling for transparency in hospital planning and equitable distribution of resources. They note that East Austin's population has grown rapidly, with many residents displaced from central neighborhoods but still reliant on nearby public hospitals. Advocates are urging the city and county to require health impact assessments before approving new hospital expansions, ensuring that underserved areas receive proportional investment.

For families waiting through the night in crowded ERs, it's a matter of survival — and a test of whether Austin's health system will serve all its residents, not just those living west of I 35.



East Austin patients face hours-long delays as hospitals expand westward, raising equity concerns and calls for oversight.

AISD Students To Hike “The Gap Mile”

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin's summer heat has already pushed triple digit temperatures, but for many East Austin families, the real crisis is only beginning. As Austin ISD implements more than \$200 million in budget cuts for the 2026–27 school year, students in several East Austin neighborhoods are losing their bus routes entirely — leaving some children to walk **two miles or more** along hazardous roads in extreme heat.

The district's decision stems from a transportation budget that has become increasingly unsustainable. AISD receives **only \$1 in state funding for every \$7.22 it spends per mile**; a **gap** district leaders say has forced them to eliminate routes deemed "costliest and least efficient." Among the routes cut outright are those serving **Campbell Elementary School** and **Eastside Early College High School**, both located in East Austin — neighborhoods where families have historically relied on districtwide transportation due to limited access to cars and safe walking paths.

For many families, the cuts are not merely inconvenient; they are dangerous. AISD's own transportation staff identified **147 walking routes** near schools that are considered unsafe, citing missing sidewalks, uncontrolled traffic arteries, highway crossings, and industrial corridors. Several of these hazardous areas are in East Austin, including segments near **Pleasant Hill Elementary**, **Travis High School**, and schools along the **Highway 183 corridor**, where students must navigate frontage roads without sidewalks.

Despite these documented hazards, AISD is returning to the state's **two mile standard**, meaning students must live at least two miles from their



AISD bus cuts force East Austin students to walk dangerous miles in extreme heat, exposing deep inequities in access and safety.

zoned school — or within a formally designated hazardous zone — to qualify for bus service. For years, several East Austin campuses had exceptions allowing students living far closer to receive transportation. Those exceptions are now gone. Elementary schools such as **Blackshear/Oak Springs**, **Norman Sims**, **Pecan Springs**, and **Zavala**, along

with middle schools like **Martin** and **Sadler Means**, will no longer receive neighborhood bus service for students living within two miles.

Families say the consequences are immediate. Parents working early shifts cannot walk their children to new "hub stops" — centralized pickup points at libraries, post offices, or CapMetro stations — which replace neighborhood stops for all middle and high school students. In East Austin, where public transit access is uneven and many households lack reliable vehicles, the hub model effectively shifts the burden onto students themselves. Some will now walk 30 to 45 minutes in heat that regularly exceeds 100 degrees.

AISD acknowledges the stress these changes create. "We recognize the stress and anxiety this causes," the district wrote to families, noting that the cuts were not made lightly. But the district's broader financial crisis — a \$205 million reduction affecting more than 500 positions and multiple core services — has left little room for alternatives.

Still, community advocates argue that the cuts disproportionately harm East Austin students, who already face higher rates of heat related illness, fewer safe walking routes, and longer commutes due to historic displacement. They point out that AISD's hazardous route evaluations often lag behind real world conditions, leaving families to navigate dangerous roads that have not yet been formally designated as "hazardous" under state criteria.

Students walking miles in extreme heat face a daily test of endurance and safety — one that begins before the first bell rings. As August approaches, East Austin families are bracing for a school year where simply getting to class may be the most dangerous part of the day.

Barbie National Collectors Convention: Carlyle Nuera Celebrates Culture, Heritage, and Inspiration Through Design



By: Melissa Fontenette-Mitchell

(AUSTIN, Texas) — During the 2026 National Barbie Doll Collectors Convention at the Hilton Austin, I had the opportunity to interview **Carlyle Nuera**, lead designer for Mattel, about the inspiration behind Barbie's cultural and historical dolls.

Nuera shared that authenticity is the foundation of every design. When creating a Barbie inspired by a real person, he begins by researching their life, contributions, and impact to ensure each doll tells an authentic story.



Carlyle Nuera

Photo credit: Melissa Fontenette-Mitchell

One of his most meaningful projects was the Barbie honoring **Maya Angelou**. After speaking with Angelou's son, Nuera incorporated thoughtful details that reflected her presence and selected warm peach and orange tones to celebrate her spirit.

He also designed the Barbie honoring **Opal Lee**, creating a doll that pays tribute to her enduring legacy and contributions to American history.

Nuera believes Barbie has the power to celebrate cultures and inspire future generations through representation. Dolls honoring influential Black and Brown leaders, professionals, artists, and changemakers allow

children and collectors to see themselves reflected in stories of courage, achievement, and possibility. By highlighting diverse cultures and lived experiences, Barbie continues to promote inclusion while encouraging young people to dream without limits.

As a Filipino American designer, Nuera has also celebrated his own heritage through Barbie, incorporating meaningful cultural symbols such as jasmine flowers and traditional Filipino tattoo designs into his creations.

The National Barbie Doll Collectors Convention continued through Saturday, July 11, at the Hilton Austin. While convention events were ticketed, the public had the opportunity to shop the 2026 Barbie Truck and visit the Sales Room on Saturday.

Also debuting during the convention, the **United States Postal Service** released its new Barbie Forever commemorative stamps on July 11. The stamps celebrate Barbie's evolution as a symbol of possibility and achievement for generations.

Introduced by Mattel in 1959 as "The Original Teenage Fashion Model," Barbie has become a global cultural icon, representing more than 250 careers over the past six decades. The new stamp collection features Barbie in a variety of professions, including registered nurse, surgeon, astronaut, firefighter, paleontologist, sign language teacher, robotics engineer, judge, soccer player, and musical artist.

Follow Melissa Fontenette-Mitchell on Instagram: @north_starphotography.

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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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Austin

Human Resources

Texas Slips in CNBC’s Business Rankings as Quality-of-Life Score Drags Down Performance

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Texas slipped two spots in CNBC’s 2026 *Top States for Business* ranking, falling from No. 2 last year to No. 4, as a sharply low quality of life score offset the state’s strengths in workforce, economic growth, and technology. The annual index, released Tuesday, evaluates states across ten weighted categories, with infrastructure and quality of life carrying increased influence in this year’s methodology.

Texas continued to outperform most of the country in business fundamentals, earning the nation’s top score for workforce and landing in the top three for both economic strength and technology and innovation. But CNBC awarded the state an **F** in quality of life—ranking Texas **49th** nationally—citing health care access, crime rates, worker protections, and reproductive rights restrictions as factors that pulled down its overall standing.

The downgrade has drawn national attention. Yahoo Finance noted that Texas’ business metrics remain among the strongest in the country, but the expanded weight of infrastructure and quality of life indicators “cost the state a higher finish.” Meanwhile, outlets including AOL, the *El Paso Times*, and Yahoo News highlighted Texas’ placement as the **second worst state to live in**, a separate CNBC assessment derived from the same quality of life scoring. Those stories emphasized the tension between Texas’ rapid population growth and its low ranking on social and living condition measures.

Political commentators have also seized on the report, with some conservative columnists accusing CNBC of ideological bias and others arguing that the ranking reflects genuine challenges facing residents. Despite the criticism, CNBC defended its methodology, saying the expanded scoring better reflects the conditions that attract and retain workers.

Texas remains a top tier business destination, but the latest ranking underscores a widening gap between the state’s economic performance and the lived experience of many residents—a divide that may shape future debates over policy, investment, and growth.

REV. AL SHARPTON AND NATIONAL ACTION NETWORK (NAN) PARTNER WITH THE KING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE “MARCH ON WASHINGTON 2026: DEFEND THE VOTE”

NAN Media

New York, NY (July 14, 2026) – National Action Network (NAN) Founder and President Rev. Al Sharpton, together with Martin Luther King III, Arndrea Waters King, and the Drum Major Institute and other partners, announced “March on Washington 2026: Defend the Vote,” to be held in Washington, D.C. on Friday, August 28, 2026, the 63rd anniversary of the historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

A growing coalition of national partners has already confirmed its participation, including the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), the National Urban League (NUL), the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation (NCBCP), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), UnidosUS, the Working Families Party, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Lawyer's Committee), and Veterans Equity Project, Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., Common Cause, People Power United, United For Democracy, Vote.org, Family Equality, In the Public Square, Bet Mishpachah, Faith in Action Fund, Faith in Action National Network, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), the Interfaith Alliance, and multiple houses of worship.

The Honorable Yvette Clarke, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, will be joined by a delegation of Members at the march, and additional partners will be announced in the coming weeks. Registration for March on Washington 2026: Defend the Vote is now open. Supporters from across the country are encouraged to register today at the National Action Network website. Register now at www.nationalactionnetwork.net

EDITORIAL | Data Centers Are Texas’ New Company Towns — And Voters Are Right to Be Angry



By Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

(VILLAGER) - Texas didn’t stumble into a data center crisis. It was built, brick by brick, incentive by incentive, by state leaders who insisted that anything done in the name of “innovation” was automatically good for the people footing the bill. Now, in the heat of the 2026 governor’s race, those same leaders want voters to believe they’ve suddenly discovered the downsides of the very industry they spent a decade courting.

Communities aren’t buying it. And they shouldn’t.

Abbott’s Pivot Isn’t Policy — It’s Panic

Gov. Greg Abbott spent years celebrating Texas as the “epicenter of AI development,” waving through billions in tax breaks and touting every new hyperscale project as proof of his economic vision. But when rural counties began revolting — when residents started showing up at meetings with water use data, noise complaints, and electric bills that made no sense — Abbott’s tune changed overnight.

Now he wants restrictions. Now he wants guardrails. Now he wants developers to pay for their own power, water, and infrastructure.

It’s a remarkable transformation, arriving not when the problems emerged, but when the politics did.

Texans have seen this pattern before: deregulate aggressively, ignore the consequences, then scramble to look tough once the backlash becomes too loud to ignore. It happened with the power grid. It happened with school vouchers. And now it’s happening with data centers.

The Real Costs Have Been Hiding in Plain Sight

Data centers don’t just appear. They demand staggering amounts of electricity, water, land, and public subsidy. Texas has handed out nearly **\$3 billion** in incentives to lure them — money that could have strengthened rural hospitals, modernized water systems, or kept property taxes in check.

Instead, Texans are watching their resources get siphoned into facilities that create few jobs, strain local infrastructure, and leave communities fighting for basic protections.

A **University of Texas** study warns that data centers could consume **up to 9% of statewide water use by 2040**. Rural counties already facing drought conditions are being told to sacrifice their aquifers so multinational corporations can train AI models.

That’s not economic development. It’s extraction.

Hinojosa Is Right About One Thing: This Crisis Was Manufactured

Democratic challenger Gina Hinojosa has hammered Abbott for building “the biggest data center giveaway in the whole country,” and the criticism lands because it’s true. The governor didn’t just allow the boom — he engineered it. He championed

St. John Pocket Park Will Close on July 16 Through August of 2028 for the St. John Site Redevelopment Project

Austin Parks and Recreation



The City of Austin will close St. John Pocket Park, 889 Wilks Ave., beginning Thursday, July 16, 2026, through August of 2028. The City has partnered with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA) and Greystar to redevelop 19 acres of adjacent vacant land into a vibrant mixed-use, mixed-income community.

As part of this collaborative effort, St. John Pocket Park will be transformed into an approximately 4-acre neighborhood park from a 0.79-acre pocket park. The expanded park will feature new amenities including a splash pad, walking trails, a pavilion, and public art, creating an enhanced and welcoming space for the community.

Get the latest facilities, pools and park closure information at: AustinTexas.gov/ParkClosures.

the incentives. He celebrated the deals. He framed every new project as proof of Texas’ superiority. Now he wants credit for trying to rein in the consequences.

Texans deserve better than election year repentance.

A Fractured GOP Reveals the Depth of the Problem

The Republican split over data centers isn’t ideological — it’s existential.

Rural lawmakers like Shelley Luther want protection from industrial encroachment. Business oriented officials like Railroad Commissioner Wayne Christian want the investment, no matter the cost. Abbott is trying to stand in both camps at once, and voters can see the strain.

This isn’t a debate about technology. It’s a debate about power — who has it, who uses it, and who pays the price.

Texas (Especially Austin) Must Decide What Kind of Tech Future It Wants

Data centers are not inherently bad. But the way Texas has pursued them — with blind faith, bottomless subsidies, and no meaningful oversight — has turned them into symbols of a deeper political failure.

Texans are not anti technology. They are anti being taken for granted.

The governor’s race has made one thing clear: voters are tired of being told that “innovation” requires their silence, their land, their water, and their tax dollars. They are tired of being treated as collateral damage in someone else’s economic narrative.

Data centers didn’t become a political flash point by accident. They became one because Texans finally said enough.

And this time, they’re saying it loudly.

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Community Notice: Austin Hospitals Flagged for Price Transparency Violations

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - Four Austin area hospitals were recently found **non compliant with federal price transparency rules**, according to a July 2026 review of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) enforcement data. These rules require hospitals to publicly post clear, accessible pricing for common procedures so patients can compare costs and make informed decisions about their care.

The facilities identified include:

- **Austin Oaks Hospital**
- **Dell Children’s Medical Center North Campus**
- **Northwest Hills Surgical Hospital**
- **Texas NeuroRehab Center**

CMS flagged these hospitals for failing to meet one or more federal requirements, such as providing a complete machine readable price file, offering an online price estimator tool, or ensuring posted prices are accurate and accessible. Non compliance can result in corrective action plans and financial penalties.

For Austin residents, this matters. Transparent pricing helps families anticipate medical costs, avoid surprise bills, and compare options across the city’s healthcare system. When hospitals fall short, it limits the community’s ability to make informed choices about care.

Community members who want to review hospital compliance status or compare procedure costs can visit the CMS Hospital Price Transparency website, which updates listings as facilities come into compliance.

Foster Grandparent Program Recruits Volunteers to Mentor Children

Texas Health and Human Services Commission



(AUSTIN, TX) – The Foster Grandparent Program is recruiting volunteers to mentor children while earning extra income.

As part of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, the Foster Grandparent Program provides an opportunity for people 55 and older with limited incomes to mentor children who have exceptional needs or are in circumstances that limit their academic, social or emotional development.

Unlike traditional foster parents, children don’t live with their foster grandparents. The program volunteers serve 15 to 40 hours a week and receive a monthly tax-free stipend.

“Our volunteers are the heart and soul of the Foster Grandparent Program,” HHS Executive Commissioner Stephanie Muth said. “Helping children work toward their potential and achieve better outcomes gives our volunteers a real sense of purpose during this chapter in their lives.”

Volunteers share their time and talents with the children they mentor, building personal relationships through trust and support. Both groups benefit from the social interaction.

George Lewis has volunteered with the program at the Lubbock State Supported Living Center for 14 years. The World War II veteran recently celebrated his 100th birthday. As the father of 11 children and a former pastor, he enjoys mentoring children and serving his community.

“I like getting out of the house and being able to interact with others,” Lewis said. “Everyone lets me know how much they enjoy having me there. It really makes my day.”

From July 2025 to June 2026, foster grandparents served 16,772 children and logged 347,581 volunteer hours.

Learn more on the **Foster Grandparent Volunteer Program webpage**, and see photos of volunteer foster grandparents. Visit hhs.texas.gov or dial 2-1-1 for more information about HHSC programs and services.

Givens Park Pool Closure Sparks Outcry During Record Heat

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) - As Austin endures one of the hottest summers on record, the closure of **Givens Park Pool** has ignited outrage among East Austin residents who say the city’s maintenance delays are endangering lives and deepening inequities in public access to cooling spaces.

The pool, a cornerstone of East Austin’s Black community since the 1950s, was abruptly closed in late June after city staff cited “mechanical failure and filtration issues.” The timing could not be worse: temperatures have hovered above **105°F for more than two weeks**, with the National Weather Service issuing repeated **excessive heat warnings**.

For residents who rely on Givens as one of the few free, walkable cooling sites east of I 35, the closure feels like neglect. “We’re told to stay safe in the heat, but the city shut down the one place we can cool off,” said *Angela Brooks*, a longtime East Austin resident and grandmother of three. “If this were Zilker or Barton Springs, it would’ve been fixed overnight.”

A Legacy of Unequal Investment

Givens Park Pool opened in 1958, named for Dr. George Washington Carver Givens, one of Austin’s first Black physicians. For decades, it served as a gathering place for East Austin families excluded from other city pools during segregation.

But residents say the facility has suffered from chronic underfunding ever since. City records show that Givens has received **less than one third the capital investment** of pools west of I 35 over the past decade. While Barton Springs and Deep Eddy have undergone multimillion dollar renovations, Givens has faced recurring closures for pump failures, leaks, and outdated filtration systems.

The latest shutdown follows a **\$1.4 million renovation completed in 2021**, which city officials said would “extend the pool’s lifespan.” Now, just five years later, the filtration system has failed again — and repairs are not expected until late August.

Community Response and City’s Explanation

At last week’s Parks and Recreation Board meeting, residents packed the chambers demanding answers. City staff explained that the pool’s filtration system “experienced catastrophic failure” and that replacement parts were delayed due to supply chain issues.

But activists and neighborhood leaders say the explanation rings hollow. “We’ve heard this story before,” said *Marcus Reed*, director of *EastSide*

Community Alliance. “Every summer, East Austin gets excuses while West Austin gets solutions.” The city has opened temporary cooling centers at recreation facilities and libraries, but residents argue those spaces are no substitute for a pool. “You can’t send kids to a library to escape 107 degree heat,” said *Brooks*. “They need water.”

Health and Safety Concerns

Public health experts warn that the closure could have serious consequences. East Austin neighborhoods already experience **higher rates of heat related illness and lower tree canopy coverage** than wealthier areas. With limited access to air conditioning and few shaded parks, pools like Givens serve as critical public health infrastructure. Dr. *Elena Torres*, an environmental health researcher at UT Austin, said the closure underscores how “climate inequity intersects with infrastructure neglect.” “When cooling resources fail in historically marginalized neighborhoods, the health impacts are immediate — dehydration, heat exhaustion, and even heat stroke,” she said.

City Promises Repairs — Residents Demand Accountability

City officials say repairs are underway and that Givens will reopen “as soon as safely possible.” But residents are skeptical. “We’ve been hearing ‘soon’ for years,” said *Reed*. “We want timelines, not talking points.”

Advocates are calling for a **dedicated East Austin Parks Equity Fund** to ensure consistent maintenance and emergency response for facilities east of I 35. They also want transparency in how repair priorities are set.

Council Member *Natasha Harper Madison*, whose district includes Givens Park, has requested a formal audit of pool maintenance spending across the city. “We can’t keep asking East Austin families to wait while they’re baking in triple digit heat,” she said.

A Symbol of More Than Recreation

For many, Givens Park Pool represents more than a place to swim — it’s a symbol of community resilience. “Our grandparents fought for this pool,” said *Brooks*. “It’s where we learned to swim, where we celebrated Juneteenth, where we built community. Closing it during record heat isn’t just poor planning — it’s a betrayal.”

As the heat wave continues, residents say they’ll keep pressing for answers — and for a city that treats East Austin’s public spaces as essential, not expendable.

Fake Money Circulating in Round Rock — Banks and Police Warn Residents

By Villager staff

(ROUND ROCK) - Round Rock police and local banks are warning residents and small businesses to be on high alert after a recent spike in ****counterfeit bills** — specifically “prop money” used for movies — circulating through retail shops, restaurants, and neighborhood markets across the city. The bills, which often look convincing at a glance, have already cost several small businesses hundreds of dollars in losses.

The problem surfaced in late June when multiple Round Rock businesses reported receiving **\$20 and \$100 bills** marked with faint disclaimers such as “*For Motion Picture Use Only*” or “*Copy Money*.” In several cases, the markings were partially obscured or folded, making them difficult to spot during busy transactions.

“This isn’t a one off incident anymore,” said *Officer Daniel Ruiz* of the Round Rock Police Department’s financial crimes unit. “We’re seeing a pattern — and we want residents and business owners to slow down and check their cash.”

Small Businesses Hit Hardest

The counterfeit bills have disproportionately affected small, family run businesses that rely on fast, high volume cash transactions. A convenience store off Gattis School Road reported losing nearly **\$300 in a single weekend**, while a food truck near Old Settlers Park unknowingly accepted multiple fake \$100 bills during a crowded evening event.

“We don’t have the margins to absorb this,” said *Priya Patel*, owner of a small grocery on Sunrise Road. “Every dollar matters. When someone hands you fake money, you’re the one who pays for it.”

Patel said she discovered the bills only after her bank flagged them during a deposit. “It’s embarrassing, but more than that, it’s scary,” she said. “You start wondering who you can trust.”

Banks Sound the Alarm

Local banks, including **A+ Federal Credit Union** and **RBFCU**, have issued public advisories urging customers to inspect cash more carefully. Bank managers say they’ve seen a noticeable uptick in prop money deposits — a sign that the bills are circulating widely, not just in isolated pockets.

“These bills are designed to look real enough to pass in a quick exchange,” said *Melissa Grant*, a branch manager at A+. “But once they hit the bank, they’re immediately rejected — and the customer is out the money.”

Banks are encouraging businesses to invest in **low cost counterfeit detectors**, many of which cost under \$20 and can identify fake bills through UV markings or magnetic ink tests.



Why Prop Money Is Showing Up Now

Police say the surge may be tied to online marketplaces where prop money is sold cheaply and shipped in bulk. Some versions are clearly labeled as fake, but others mimic real currency closely enough to fool an untrained eye.

Round Rock PD is investigating whether the bills are being passed intentionally or whether teens and young adults are using them without understanding the legal consequences. “Regardless of intent, passing fake money is a crime,” Officer Ruiz said. “We’re treating every case seriously.”

How Residents Can Protect Themselves

Authorities recommend several steps:

- **Check for texture:** Real currency has a distinct feel due to its cotton linen blend.
- **Look for color shifting ink:** On real bills, the numeral in the lower right corner changes color when tilted.
- **Inspect for watermarks:** Hold the bill up to the light to check for embedded portraits.
- **Watch for wording:** Prop money often includes phrases like “*Motion Picture Use Only*” or “*Replica*.”

Police also encourage residents to report any suspicious bills immediately. “Even one report helps us track patterns,” Ruiz said.

A Community on Alert

Round Rock’s rapid growth — and its busy retail corridors — make it a prime target for low level financial scams. But residents say the counterfeit surge feels like a violation of trust in a city known for its tight knit business community.

“We’re all trying to make an honest living,” Patel said. “When someone hands you fake money, it’s not just theft — it’s disrespect.”

Police expect the issue to continue through the summer and are planning public workshops with local banks to help residents spot counterfeit bills before they spread further.

For now, Round Rock’s message is simple: **slow down, check your cash, and report anything suspicious**.