
Tonight, Tuesday, is the night

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September 19, 2017



Dear SMRFers:

There is a major event for SMRF at city council tonight, Tuesday 9/19, and we hope you can be there. We have been working for five years to preserve a band of natural areas around the north and west side of our city. Most of our members know this, are excited about it, and realize the urgent need to do this if we want the river to remain clear and flowing well, since that is a recharge area for our San Marcos Springs, the head of our river. And the tracts will protect our city from worse flooding, if the land is kept vegetated, with recharge features intact and open.

We bought the two ranches to keep the land affordable for our city as our city grows, that is why we worked quietly for five years. We also completed Dreamcatcher Ranch's conservation easement this year, with the help of the Meador family and GBR Land Trust, and grants from NRCS, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and the Meadows Foundation of Dallas. But much more remains to be done. We bought the two ranches with loans from The Conservation Fund, for very reasonable prices. Now we are at a point where we are asking the City to consider helping us get a little more time to look for the grants we will need to get these lands conserved permanently. We knew that once the land is developed, it is lost forever as a conservation ranch or natural area.

We will be at the Council meeting Tuesday night, tonight, since Council has an item on their agenda to consider applying for a TWDB loan, at very low interest though we think they can wait some time before they actually have to think about borrowing anything. We want the chance to find enough in grants, with the help of the Meadows Center and Andy Sansom, and the Upper SM

Watershed Plan, so that the city can purchase it later for very little. There is also an opportunity with these TWDB loans to have a large chunk of the cost forgiven! Especially for communities that have a low per capita income like ours.

The initial application the city did last spring to check this loan idea out, was rated first in all the applications! One of our partners who has been encouraging us to do this land conservation work for the springs, SOS in Austin, found out the state had a fund that very few people were applying for, so we told our city about it so they could apply. Because land is going up in price so quickly as SM develops, it is a critical time to get this protective land band around our springs done at a low price, and get some grants applied for! We know this will help prevent worse future floods, and protect water quality in the river. One of the tracts drains directly to Spring Lake via Sink Creek. The other has a large cave in a huge ravine that flows water into the aquifer when it rains. See that cave recharging in a video at: www.sanmarcosriver.org.

It would be great to have these as natural areas, though maybe for a while they could be leased to continue to have ranchers mow the hayfield and graze some cattle to keep the places maintained, fences repaired, and even continue to eradicate feral hogs on the ranches. That is what SMRF has been doing to maintain the ranches, plus we've had some great volunteers helping us too. Stay tuned for volunteer days this fall at the two ranches.

Another great side benefit would be to use these ranches to make a complete trail loop from Spring Lake Preserve to Ringtail Ridge on RR 12, and on to connect with Purgatory Preserve. These trails could be ways to get to work or to school on foot or using bikes, so that you did not have to drive everywhere. It is not the main reason SMRF purchased the lands, we did it for the springs and river and preventing floods, but it is a definite plus to have such a useful transportation system of trails. And this route is on the city's transportation master plan, and there is also an Upper SM Watershed Plan that prioritizes land conservation as very important for water quality, so both those plans will make the grant proposals stronger and more competitive. Timing wise, this could not be a better time for the city to express their interest, so grants can be sought.

We do not want to make their Council meeting long with lots of speakers, however. But if you want to come for the beginning of the meeting, we will speak in favor of this item during public comment

and ask everyone there to support this item to please rise. So come inside and seat yourself in the actual Chamber at 6. Or if you cannot come, just email mayor_council_info@sanmarcostx.gov. If you read this email too late, send an email of support for land conservation above Spring Lake anyway, just so they know you support this. Later in this meeting TONIGHT we will have experts there to speak to the Council on the particular tracts.. Please take this once in a lifetime chance to urge Council support for this conservation effort that will help preserve our river as a clear river into the future.

BLANCO BRIDGE: There is one more chance this week to write a quick email to make sure CAMPO knows that there is concern about the bridge across the Blanco. It is a bridge that joins two pieces of private property that is up for development, and Kyle is asking CAMPO for the \$30 million based on a development agreement with the landowners. It is not in a transportation plan that has been publicly aired. So CAMPO is likely to pull it out of their plan for now, but your comments will make it clear that many people are watching. The address is campo@campotexas.org . Deadline 9/21 at 5 p.m.. so be sure to get this done quickly. A wonderful PDF of a template letter is on the TESPAs website: <http://tespatexas.org/documents/campo-comment-letter-template>, so that is super easy.