

Preservation of Resources

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Sustainability Issues

Alamo Heights is a city that has a rich history and possesses immense natural beauty. The strong conviction of the residents to preserve trees and historic resources has been expanded to include the strong desire to be a more sustainable city, ensuring that there is a vibrant and “green” town for future generations. One of the most quoted definitions of sustainability is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In the fall meetings, the most common desire among residents of all ages and different neighborhoods was to be more “green.” Initiating new programs and encouraging change will ensure that the future of Alamo Heights is protected.



A more sustainable city today will result in increased self-sufficiency and a community prepared to manage the change and demands they will encounter when faced with issues affecting the quality of life for its citizens. The plan proposes the use of rain gardens or bio-swales to control storm run-off and promotes the use of alternative energy sources, including wind generated electricity and solar power along with the adoption of design regulations to mitigate the visual impact. Building community gardens and adopting Green Building standards are also proposed. Sustainable communities can secure an increased quality of life for its residents and more thoughtful development, resulting in better construction and design.

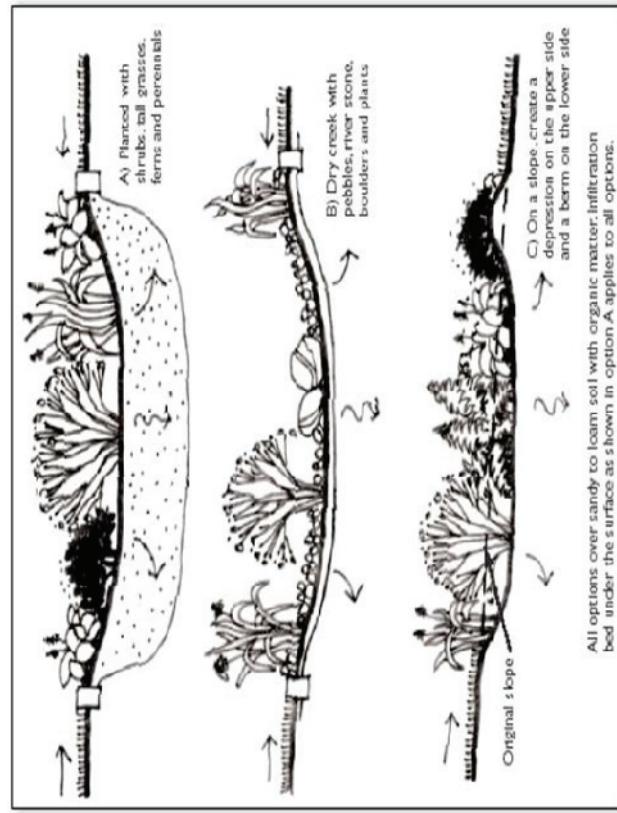
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Water Harvesting

Harvesting rain water is the capturing and collecting of rainfall to use for irrigation of plants, the lawn or to even wash your car. Water harvesting is not a new concept; in fact it is one of the oldest methods for irrigation known since the beginning of agriculture. Harvesting water will help minimize the amount of water run-off and helps to lower monthly water bills.

Action Step

- Consider a rebate program for the installation of rain barrels as an incentive to residents to harvest water.



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Alternative Energy

Tapping into alternative renewable sources of energy has a positive impact on the environment and reduces the need for fossil fuels. Alternative energy can come from solar powered or wind generated sources. City Public Service offers Windtricity as an alternative energy source that allows users to choose their level or percentage of participation. The City of Alamo Heights uses wind generated energy in its municipal facilities. Solar power technology has advanced greatly and provides property owners with many options for function and installation.

Action Steps

- Encourage residents to participate in the CPS Windtricity program at a level of their choice.
- Reduce permit cost for the installation of solar panels.
- Establish design guidelines for the installation of solar panels to minimize visibility.



Recycling Program

Alamo Heights' residents have made their commitment to a healthier environment evident based on the great number of participants in the curbside recycling program. The development of a new program to encourage the use of recycled building materials could raise the city to the next level of environmental commitment to limit the amount of reusable materials added to landfills every year. Doors, windows and hard woods can be used for new construction and remodeling projects, adding a unique character and charm.

Action Steps

- Boost current curbside recycling program through an awards/recognition campaign.
- Reduce permit cost as an incentive to use recycled building materials.



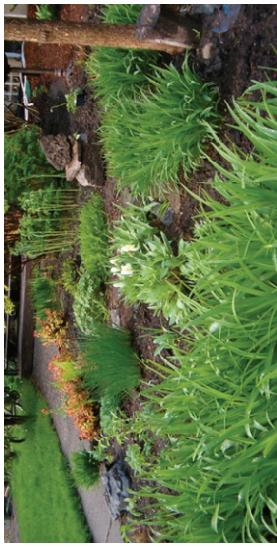
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Community Gardens

The rewards from creating community gardens are vast and can provide exponential value. The community would have new opportunities to build relationships and connections with their neighbors while improving the appearance of unused green spaces. The gardens could bring together residents of all ages where stories of Alamo Heights life can be shared and passed on to the younger generation. Families who decide to participate could have new occasions for conversation and quality time. Best of all, working in a garden creates opportunities for recreation, exercise, and education, thereby, improving the quality of life for the users and inspires residents to care for and improve the quality of the natural environment.

Action Steps

- Dedicate vacant areas/lots for community gardens.
- Assist and encourage residents to create community gardens through information and education.



ENERGY STAR



Green Building Standards

Establishing green building standards advances architecture that centers on the efficient use of water, energy and materials realizing positive impacts on the environment. Good design enhances the quality of life for the users. The economic benefits of green building practices can have a positive impact on the economy by encouraging the purchase of materials from local sources and increasing the need for contractors with special skills. The owners can expect a cost savings over the project's lifecycle because of lower maintenance and utility costs.

Action Steps

- Create and adopt green building standards for commercial and residential projects.
- Reduce permit fees for projects using green building standards.



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Tree Preservation

One of the great natural resources in Alamo Heights is the beautiful tree canopy, which is one of the most recognized attributes of the city's desirability and allure. As a city, Alamo Heights views the importance of its urban forest as a whole ecological system. By acknowledging the importance of each individual tree, it is understood that the continued health and maintenance of one tree can significantly impact the health of an entire forest. During the neighborhood meetings, numerous requests were made for a stronger tree preservation effort.

A number of healthy species of trees thrive in Alamo Heights, but a diversity of trees is desirable and helps prevent the widespread devastation caused by single species disease or infestations. Native trees or those commonly found in South Texas, should be encouraged. In recent years, East Texas trees have been introduced into Alamo Heights neighborhoods and have proven to be less tolerant of the local geological and climatic conditions. Trees of varying heights and foliage densities add to the lushness of Alamo Heights' landscapes and should be encouraged.

Demolition of a heritage tree should be considered as a last resort, and owners should have to demonstrate that no other alternative is available. Stricter standards should be developed to protect root zones during construction. Tree canopy coverage standards should be developed and a one-for-one replacement ration (the number of caliper inches of trees removed should be, therefore, replaced with the same number of caliper inches) maintained on each site. The City should strengthen the requirements for tree service companies, which work within Alamo Heights' boundaries. It is recommended that a requirement for a certified arborist or degreed forester to monitor all construction projects is adopted as Code.



- Action Steps**
- Strengthen the tree preservation ordinance
 - Tree City, USA.

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Historic Preservation

The preservation and renovation of older buildings has significantly contributed to the character of Alamo Heights. The Argyle, the former Mobil Station with its flying Pegasus and the concrete sculpted Trolley Stop are iconic Alamo Heights structures, and their demise would be a great loss to the community. At the neighborhood meetings in the fall and the Community Design Workshop in January, Historic Preservation and the ability to protect landmark structures from demolition were mentioned as a worthy goal for the community. Preserving the built environment would also contribute to the overall goal of sustainability.

Action Steps

- Adopt a historic preservation enabling ordinance that would establish the City's ability to create and protect historic landmarks. The ordinance would establish criteria, consistent with state law, and describe a process for designation.
- Identify and designate, based on the established criteria, those important structures worthy of Landmark status.



- Establish a process for property owners to voluntarily designate their homes or businesses.
- Conduct a comprehensive historic resource survey to determine areas or districts that might qualify for designation.
- Adopt a Historic District designation process.
- Offer an ad valorem tax incentive to encourage preservation of historic properties.
- Establish a non-profit corporation to buy, renovate and sell properties that would otherwise be scheduled for demolition.
- Adopt policies that require the re-use of a percentage of building materials before a demolition is permitted to reduce the amount of recyclable building materials ending up in landfills.

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Dark Sky Community - Lighting

At the Neighborhood Meetings held in the Fall of 2008, the community expressed a clear desire to modernize public and private lighting by significantly limiting unwanted glare, thereby, minimizing light pollution. While some expressed a need for additional street lighting in certain areas, the vast majority wished to reduce, rather than to increase, lighting. An important balance, therefore, must be reached and new light fixtures should be dark sky compliant. Lighting that extends above the horizontal plane is largely ineffective, therefore, only leading to increased light pollution. Since outdoor lighting is expensive, eliminating misdirected and overly bright lighting saves money. Furthermore, excessive glare is, not only a strong indicator of waste and is aesthetically unappealing, it also provides safety concerns because of its tendency to cause temporary blindness in drivers.

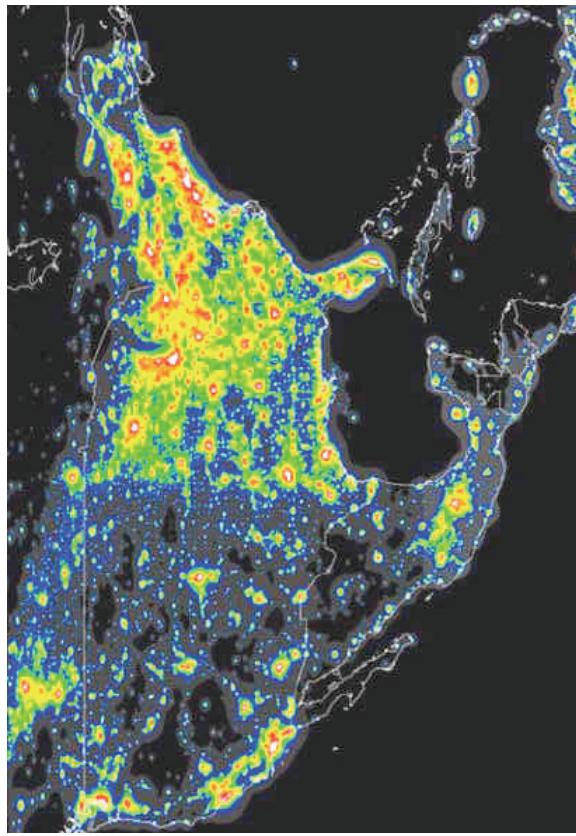
A “Dark Sky Community” is an organized community that has shown exceptional dedication to the preservation of the night sky through the implementation and enforcement of quality lighting codes, dark sky education, and citizen support of dark skies.

Recent comprehensive surveys in the city reveal that much of the public street lighting is not energy efficient and, therefore, not cost-effective. Since newer, fully-shielded lighting fixtures typically consume about half the electricity as the typical existing lighting fixture lining Alamo Heights streets, savings from significantly lower energy costs should pay for the new fixtures in the long-run.

In addition to the street lights, unnecessary glare in both the public (schools, banks, churches, filling stations, etc.) and private sectors (mainly exterior lighting of homes) is also prevalent in Alamo Heights, which typically results from inefficient fixtures, excessive power, and poor aim of light sources.

Action Steps

- Encourage CPS Energy to hasten the replacement of outmoded street lights.
- Develop a lighting ordinance that would:
 - Discourage excess lighting;
 - Provide safe, efficient and attractive outdoor lighting;
 - Conserve energy, thus, reducing costs;
 - Reduce glare and unwanted illumination from surrounding streets and properties; and
 - Preserve the darkness and clarity of the night sky.
- Become a “Dark Sky Community.”





LOOKING AHEAD

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF ALANOC HEIGHTS