

August 28, 2013

Honorable Members of the Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission:

This letter is to provide you with information on the history of our neighborhood with respect to interactions with various government entities over the last 30 years, and to request that you accurately characterize our neighborhood in such a way that we are not once again diluted and without representation as has been the case all these years.

Relevant History:

We moved to Austin from San Antonio in October 1981 and reside in our same home to this day, located at 2600 Monitor Drive in the Shiloh subdivision in South Austin. The neighborhood is bounded by Shiloh Drive to the north, Seminary Ridge on the west, Manchaca Road to the East, and Davis Lane to the south. This (roughly) is Track 17.48. Today our population is roughly 45 percent Caucasian, 40 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Black and 7 percent Asian.

Shortly after moving to Austin, our children were bussed almost 16 miles each way, each school day, to Allan Elementary in far East Austin, despite the fact that Cunningham Elementary was but 1.5 miles from the house. This went on for three or four years for all small children in our neighborhood. This required them to catch the bus at around 6:45 a.m. and home around 4:30 p.m. or later, depending on their grade level. It also required us as parents to drive this distance for parent-teacher meetings, PTA meetings, etc., which we dutifully did. It is important to note that even in 1981 our neighborhood was ethnically diverse, so even black and Hispanic children were being bussed. We purchased our home from a Hispanic family.

In 1988 the Austin Independent School District (AISD) built Covington Middle School, located about 3 miles from our home. However, the "boundaries" that were drawn up by AISD had only children west of Seminary Ridge able to attend Covington. Once again my children were split up from many of their schoolmates and were required to be bussed over to Bedichek Middle School instead. We were placed with neighborhoods to the east of us, all the way across Interstate 35. In fact, the boundaries for Travis County Precinct 4 run from Seminary Ridge (3 houses from our home) all the way out past Bergstrom International Airport.

In the early 1980's Austin was installing cable television. The company, then known as Austin Cablevision and directly overseen by the City of Austin, left our neighborhood as the last one for installation of cable in Austin. We had so many problems with our cable that one repair person privately showed us (and gave us) a note he was given by his supervisors which read, "Last visit to this address – no further requests for service honored." Not long after this I went to a public hearing the City held regarding the operations of Austin Cablevision and read the note to the City Council. That is what it took to get equitable service to our neighborhood.

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In the 32 years we have lived in our home, we have never had any direct representation on the Austin City Council. Among the additional problems we have encountered include:

Deteriorating pavement on some of our streets (with only superficial repairs made); oil and gas pipeline issues, including a proposal by the City to require us to *fireproof* two sides and the roof of our house because we are within 100 feet of the pipeline (luckily this effort failed); lack of enforcement of speed limits in our neighborhood; drug dealings, and other issues that required us to write to/call the City. Many of these requests were ignored as I discovered when I have called 311 back with the service order number and finding that nothing had been done.

In 2009 the wife was walking our dachshund when she and the dog were attacked by a pit bull. We and the neighbors caught the loose dog and tied him to a mail box on a leash with water and waited for animal control to show up. Four hours later someone showed up. Meanwhile, we had to take the dog to the vet for 28 stitches in her neck and the wife to the emergency room for treatment of a dog bite to her finger. The wife and our previous dog were also attacked – by a Great Dane that was running loose. The owners skipped town and left the dog at the pound to be euthanized.

TODAY.

As indicated above, our Shiloh neighborhood is ethnically very diverse. We take pride in our neighborhood and we enjoy living there. Even so, for various unknown reasons over the years we have continually been lumped in with the neighborhoods to our east, again stretching all the way out past the Airport. However, our needs are our own and cannot be compared with the needs of those we may live many miles away. I am quite sure that far east and southeast Austin have their own issues as well, just not our issues. We have much more in common with those who live north, south, and west of our neighborhood.

For example, the City is planning to redo the intersection of Deer Run/Guidepost Trail/Davis Lane with Brodie Lane, in order to speed up traffic on Brodie what extends all the way south to the Travis County line mornings and afternoons. This also facilitates traffic from Mopac who use Deer Run/Davis Lane as a cross-town route to their homes in the South Congress/South First Street area. Davis Lane is but two lanes wide and is really an old country road. However, Davis Lane is a very small country-type road, not even wide enough to divide by striping. In addition, at the intersection with Manchaca Road, traffic needs to turn right/turn left/go straight. Traffic backs up for a quarter mile or more at this intersection, with the right hand lane traveling both east across Manchaca Road and turning south onto Manchaca. So, if only a single car at the head of this lane is going straight, every other car in that lane must sit until the light changes in order to turn right. This is opposed to traffic on the east side of the intersection, which has four lanes,

including both right and left turn lanes. Bottom line, the City is encouraging traffic to cut through our neighborhood but not widening the road to accommodate that amount of traffic, which amounts to thousands of cars each morning and evening.

Further, the city has licensed a builder to put up 50 low cost homes at the intersection of West Gate Boulevard and Cameron Loop. Cameron Loop is an even narrower "country road" than Davis Lane, and yet it takes on about 1,000 cars from the neighborhood and from neighborhoods to the west and north, working their way eastward in the mornings and westward in the evenings. And even more so, the city recently completed the full connection of West Gate Boulevard all the way from Slaughter Lane to U.S. 290, which has brought yet more traffic through our neighborhoods from homeowners to the south and west taking West Gate to get to 290, Lamar, and Ben White Boulevards. This alone has caused so much morning and evening traffic on West Gate that it's now hard for those of us who live in the area to pull out only West Gate.

Further, the City permitted the builders of a new subdivision east between Manchaca Road and Seminary Ridge to cut our little two block Monitor Drive all the way through to Manchaca Road. Monitor Drive is now a "thoroughfare" for those who live west of Manchaca Road and heading west, instead of the little neighborhood street we thought it always would be.

This fully demonstrates the "connections" we have with neighborhoods to our south, west, and north, as opposed to the old boundaries what included us as the western edge of County Precinct 3. I would trust that you will take this into consideration when drawing up the new district that will eventually include our neighborhoods in South and Southwest Austin.

One final note: Several years ago the Austin City Council established "neighborhood districts" in Austin that have allowed for the residents of those neighborhoods to help direct the activities of the City....what the residents see as their needs as well as what they cherish and what they don't want. These "districts" on the south end of the city end at William Cannon Boulevard. Therefore, those of us, and we are many, who live south of William Cannon have had little say in what happens in our neighborhoods. I've spoken to the Planning Commission, and they have verified that, under the current City Council's plans, it will be quite some time before there is a move to do the same for our neighborhoods.

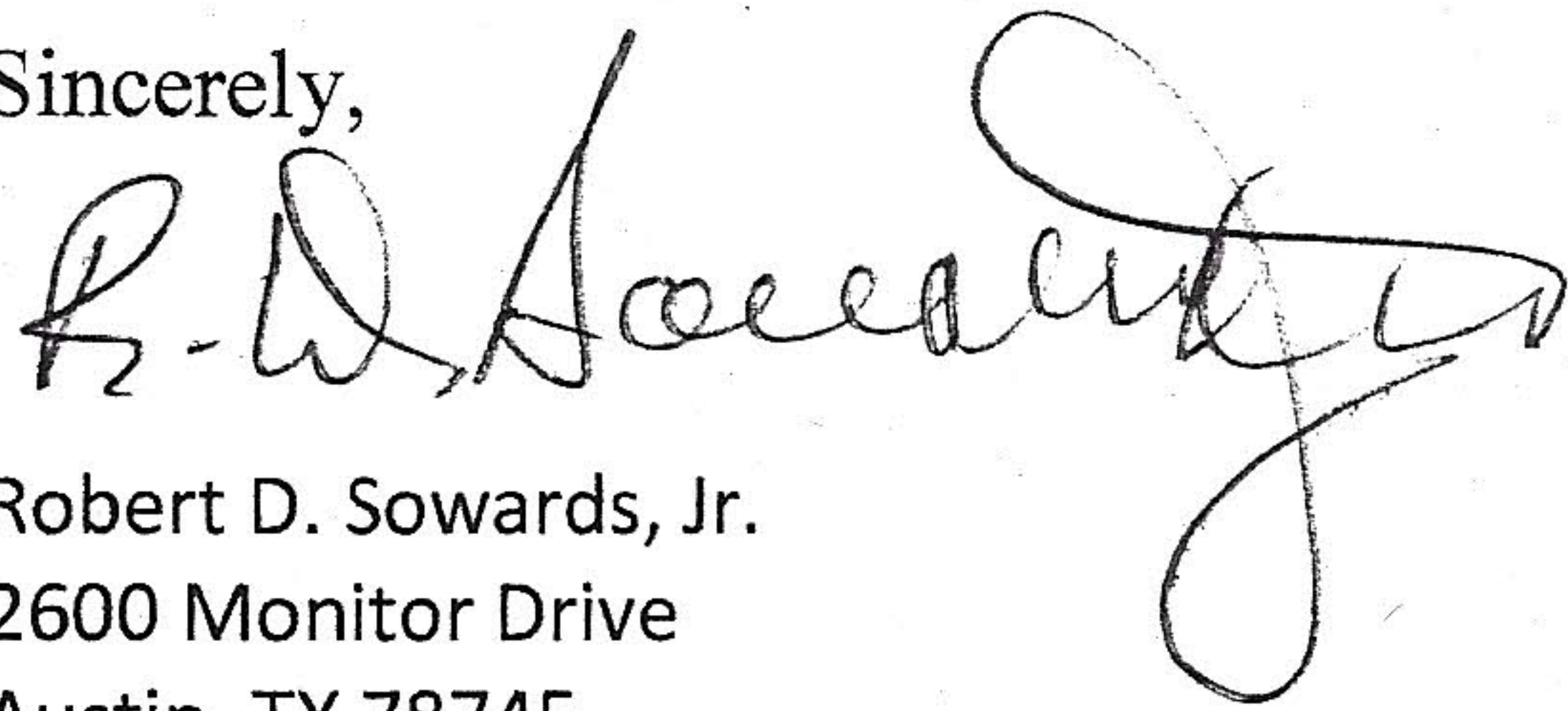
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Therefore, I would hope that you will take into account (1) the history of how we've been adversely affected over the years by the decisions made by the City and AISD; (2) our current ethnic makeup as it relates to the areas immediately surrounding us; (3) our direct ties to the neighborhoods to our south, west, and north; and (4) the needs of our area of Austin, with respect to any Council District boundaries you eventually draw up for 2014. We need someone to represent the citizens who reside in our part of South/Southwest Austin.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. D. Sowards, Jr.", written in dark ink.

Robert D. Sowards, Jr.
2600 Monitor Drive
Austin, TX 78745
512-282-2300

