



Steering Committee Members:

Adrienne Goldsberry, Chair

Renaë Alsobrook, Christine Buendel, Sandy Cartwright, Kate Ertle, Claudette Kazzoun, Kevin Kimbrough,

Andi March, Maureen Metteauer, Shawn Shillington, Alexer Taganas, Jim Todd, Derek Victory

September 24, 2021

The Honorable Kathie Tovo

District 9 Council Member

301 W 2nd Street

Austin, TX 78701

Dear Council Member Tovo,

At the September General Membership meeting of the Old West Austin Neighborhood Association (OWANA), our members voted in favor of renaming Lamar Beach Park to Volma Overton Sr. Shores, in honor of one of Austin's most prominent leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. On behalf of the Membership, our hope is that this vote is part of the initiation of the formal renaming process.

We appreciate your attention to this request, and please contact us if you need any additional information from us to move this process forward.

Please be advised that this letter is an updated letter of support for renaming; OWANA also voted in support of the renaming at the June 2019 meeting and sent a letter to you (see attached) dated July 28, 2019.

Thank you for service to our city, and contact me if you have any questions about this matter.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Goldsberry

Chair, OWANA Steering Committee

[chair@owana.org](mailto:chair@owana.org)

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OLD WEST AUSTIN NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Austin City Council  
AND  
Austin Parks &  
Recreation Department

July 28, 2019

City of Austin  
301 W 2nd St  
Austin, TX 78701

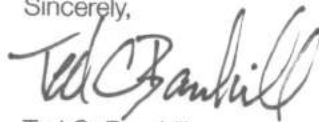
Dear Austin Parks and Recreation Department AND Austin City Council:

At the June General Membership meeting of the **Old West Austin Neighborhood Association (OWANA)**, our members voted in favor of renaming Lamar Beach Park to become **Volma Overton Sr. Shores** in honor of one of Austin's most prominent leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. On behalf of the Membership, our hope is that this vote will lead to the city staff beginning the formal process necessary for establishing this new name.

We appreciate your attention to this request and hope to learn what additional steps we might take to help move this process forward. For your convenience, I have attached additional information on the steps we have already taken to get to this point as well as biographical info on Mr. Overton.

We look forward to hearing your response to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ted C. Barnhill

Chair, OWANA Steering Committee

chair@owana.org

### Background on our process:

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- At our **March 2019 General Membership meeting**, a group of neighbors presented the history of **Volma Robert Overton, Sr.** and introduced the proposal for renaming a park in his honor.
- Prior to the vote in favor of the name change, the OWANA Steering Committee discussed options at their **monthly meetings in April and May**, voted to support the change the name of Lamar Beach Park to become **Volma Overton Sr. Shores** and to bring this proposal to the general membership.
- Finally, for a second time, the members of OWANA openly discussed the proposal and voted to support the name change at our **June Membership Meeting**.
- The current area named Lamar Beach Park is bordered by **Lady Bird Lake to the south, Lamar Blvd to the east, MoPac to the west**, and the **MoPac railroad tracks to the north**.
- Members of the OWANA Steering Committee, as well as many at large members of OWANA expressed that Mr. Overton's accomplishments deserved **recognition in a highly visible context**. There was general agreement that there's no better visibility in our neighborhood boundaries than the Lamar Beach Area with the amount of people passing through in cars on **Lake Austin Boulevard** and on bikes or foot along the **Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail**.
- The benign nature of the current official name of the park, "Lamar Beach," leaves the citizens of Austin in the dark about this parkland. Most have never heard of it beyond those who are involved in city planning. However, **its prominent location provides a great opportunity** to bring attention to one of our city heroes and honor someone who made an enormous impact.
- The members of OWANA understand the impact of this name change extends beyond the boundaries of our neighborhood. So members of our steering committee have already taken steps to engage other stakeholders in the renaming process including: **Austin Pets Alive, Austin High School, West Austin Youth Association, and Town Lake YMCA**.

### **Background on Volma Robert Overton, Sr. (1924-2005):**

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Remembering the Austin civil rights leader, Volma Robert Overton, Sr., by naming a centrally located public park in his honor is important as a way to preserve the dramatic history of his era by making his name familiar to current Austinites.

Volma Overton is best known for desegregating the Austin Independent School District through a lawsuit he filed in 1970 that named his daughter, DeDra, as the lead plaintiff. However, he began his lifelong career as an advocate for civil rights and equality in 1952 when he served as the president of the National Alliance of Postal Workers, a union of mostly African American maintenance and janitorial workers, where he advocated for equal treatment of the races in the postal system.

In 1962, he was persuaded to take the position of president of the Austin branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP). In his capacity as the Austin branch president he participated in the 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March.

Locally, as president of the NAACP, he organized sit-ins, marches, and other demonstrations against inequality. Due to his leading efforts with Boy Scout Troop #70 and a local attorney, the swimming pool at Bastrop State Park was integrated in 1963. "Overton was instrumental in starting the Austin NAACP's first credit union for the local African-American Community, which, until then, had few lending resources available to it." He and the NAACP made strenuous efforts, beginning in 1964, to get the Austin City Council to create an anti-discrimination ordinance and a Human Relations Commission to deal with discrimination complaints. The Commission was eventually established, but only as an advisory board. In 1984, Overton began efforts to review whether the City's at-large, majority place system for election of city council members violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After a total of seven votes over the years, the City Council finally passed the proposition for geographic representation (single-member districts) in 2012. Note that this is only a brief summary of the efforts and accomplishments of Volma Overton in the public sphere.

Overton's effectiveness as a crusader for civil rights and equality was enhanced by his personal qualities. In 1963, soon after First Baptist Church had announced that membership was open to all races, he presented himself for membership. He became a dear friend to all, and a lay leader – visiting the sick and those in nursing homes. Within a few years he was asked to become a deacon. With his guidance, First Baptist began a mentoring program at Oak Springs Elementary School. People who knew him personally have remarked that his overarching purpose was to bring people together.

Volma Overton has received numerous awards for his civil rights work, including the NAACP Arthur B. DeWitty Award in 1967, *The Villager* newspaper's Austin Living Legends award, and in 2004 he was one of five civil rights pioneers presented with the first LBJ Award for Leadership in Civil Rights by the University of Texas at Austin. Additionally, an elementary school in northeast Austin is named for him. Overton died on October 31, 2005 and is buried, along with his wife, at Texas State Cemetery.

It is important to honor such a central figure in Austin's history so that we do not forget the times he lived through, and the changes that courageous citizens such as he were able to accomplish. Drivers stopped for the traffic light at W. Cesar Chavez and Reynolds Drive, and users of the Butler Hike and Bike Trail should be able to see signage designating Volma Robert Overton, Sr. Shores. It would be especially helpful in arousing interest in his story if a statue of him, or of him and his wife, could also be erected.