

October in Austin AGC History – Austin AGC Leadership Supports 1950s Bond Proposal to Accommodate City Growth

Dealing with population growth may seem like only a recent headache for the Austin community, but it is certainly not a new concern for City leaders and the local construction industry. In fact, way back on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 17, 1950, the Austin AGC held a membership meeting, and guests in attendance included City Manager Walter Seaholm and Austin School Board Member Noble Prentice invited to discuss a proposed \$20 million (roughly \$227 million today) bond election on the ballot in November.

Both speakers noted that the increased population growth of Austin made necessary the expansion of public schools and infrastructure projects including water and sewer systems, streets bridges, libraries, and airport improvements to be funded by the bonds. At the time, Austin had about 132,000 people (compared to 1 million today) but that number represented more than a doubling of the population over the previous 15 years since 1935. (In fact, the population of Austin [has doubled roughly every 20 years](#) since 1920.)

Attendees at that AGC meeting agreed that the bond proposals merited approval. Accordingly, AGC board member Frank Rundell made a motion that the AGC go on record as supporting the bond election, and the recommendation was approved unanimously. Ultimately, the eight bond measures were [approved overwhelmingly by city voters as well](#).



W.D. Anderson, Austin
AGC Chair 1962-1963

While we previously covered [highlights of Frank Rundell's building career](#) in the January edition of our 75th anniversary updates, another contractor in attendance at that October 1950 meeting was W.D. Anderson, owner of W.D. Anderson Construction. He went on to serve as the 10th elected leader of the Austin AGC during the 1962-1963 years. [Historical records indicate that he built projects](#) for St. Edwards University as well as the Austin School District. Additionally, he was a lifelong birding enthusiast who built the [Rockport Marine Laboratory](#) in 1948 on the Texas Gulf Coast. That building is still functional today, and a [historical marker](#) commemorating that project can be found there as well.

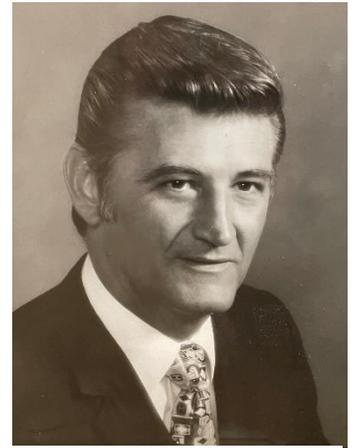


Rockport Marine Lab in the late 1940s

Over the years as Austin has continued to grow, the Austin AGC has consistently advocated in favor of public investment to accommodate the city's steady growth. In September 1972, for example, the City Manager Dan Davidson and Council Member Dick Nichols visited with the Board of Directors to explain the upcoming Capital Improvement Program on the election ballot that month. At that time, the population of Austin had doubled in twenty years from 1950 and stood at nearly 276,000 citizens. To meet the demands of this growth, the bond program on offer again called for a variety of street, water, fire, police, hospital, and library improvements including building of a Central Library on Guadalupe Street. After the City officials spoke, AGC Vice Chairman Royce Faulkner moved that the Chapter endorse the programs as presented, and Treasurer Ken Wendler seconded the motion that was passed unanimously. Austin [voters ultimately passed all but one of the bond measures](#), the rejected proposal relating to construction of the South Texas Nuclear Plant.

[Austin's Faulk Central Library](#) was then built by Austin AGC member Faulkner Construction and opened in 1979. Closed now after the 2017 opening of the new Central Library that was funded by an AGC supported and voter-approved bond in 2006 and built by Austin AGC member [Hensel Phelps Construction](#), the old library will now house documents from the [Austin History Center](#). (Files there are an excellent resource for anyone seeking original documents related to Austin's development over the years.)

Highlights of Mr. Faulkner's career are featured in the [May edition of our 75th anniversary](#) updates. As [for Mr. Wendler](#), he served as Austin AGC Chairman in 1974 and owned the Anken Construction company. He built many projects here such as the Montopolis Bridge, Nelson Football Stadium, and the Fannie Davis Gazebo on Town Lake. His passion for local politics became his major focus from the early 1970's on. In 1972 he became the Travis County Democratic Party Chairman and ultimately became known as the Godfather of progressive politics in Austin.



Ken Wendler, Chair of the Austin AGC in 1974



Fannie Davis Gazebo Dedication in 1970

The Gazebo was originally built in 1970 at the behest of the local Austin Chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction. When it was renovated in 1985, it was renamed for the charter member of Women in Construction's Austin chapter, Fannie Davis, who passed away in 1997. Fannie also proudly served as the Executive Secretary of the Austin AGC from 1948 to 1966. In fact, her detailed meeting records serve as the main source for these monthly AGC history updates! [Additional history of the Gazebo is available here.](#)

The AGC has also consistently advocated at the State level for tuition revenue bonds that provide funding for construction at public universities across Texas. In fact, in October 2021 the legislature approved \$3.3 billion for these bonds and construction of research buildings, health facilities and various other projects at public universities and health institutions across the state. Many of our members have built and will build projects on the campuses of the University of Texas, Texas A&M, and Texas State thanks to revenue bond funding.

Our infrastructure is one of our greatest assets, as well as one of our most important responsibilities. While nobody likes to pay taxes, the simple fact is that public spending for community benefit is an absolute necessity to provide for the well-being and safety of citizens in any community. Without public funding, the services that make our city livable – such as roads and bridges, clean drinking water, wastewater treatment, facilities for police and fire departments, libraries, and schools – would simply not exist. Once approved by voters, our member companies have a proud history of building those bond-funded projects that contribute to Austin's quality of life!



Miss Fannie Davis, Executive Secretary of the Austin AGC from 1948-1966

