

# Austin City Council Meeting (9/27/12)

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The American system of governance originally placed a higher premium on local governments, such as cities, towns, and counties. Now, it is the Almighty Federal Government that people tend to obsess over, considering the [corporate media](#) coverage as well as the flow of power that as exercised flows top-down instead of bottom-up. The *federales* use the congressional [power of the purse](#) to bribe and otherwise harangue the 50 state-level governments into doing whatever they want. Despite all this, it is still important to know the “lay of the land” of your local area.



After having my bag scanned and myself successfully passed through the metal detector without incident, I was able to waltz around the Austin, TX City Hall in order to burn a little time while I waited for the monthly meeting of the city council to convene. Turns out that the claim they have on their website that while they do charge for parking in their garage that, “[Parking is free on Council meeting days,](#)” turns out to be a complete lie. [Monday through Friday between 5:45 am to 5pm the first 30 minutes are free, but after that, they charge the following:](#)

*31 min – 1hr = \$3*

*1 hr – 1hr 30 min = \$4.50*

*1hr 30 min – 2 hr = \$6*

*2 hr – 2hr 30 min = \$7.50*

*2hr 30 min – 3hr = \$9*

At least they had that nifty glass enshrouded press room, where all the city officials could look all important as they announced their admittedly symbolic “marriage equality” resolution, despite Article 1 of the Texas Constitution (the [Texas Bill of Rights](#)) stating very explicitly under Section 32 that “(a) Marriage in this state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman. (b) This state or a political subdivision of this state may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage.” Like it or not, that also means no civil unions for queers, folks.

It does beg the question though as to why the Austin City Council is hellbent on defying the Texas Constitution. It’s not like its hard for them to get a copy of the state’s Constitution (especially considering that the Texas Capitol building is just across downtown). The even bigger question is [why the Texas government is in the business of marriage](#) in the first place? Why would queers want to be allowed to get a license from the government at all? So they can ask permission from the State of Texas to [engage in an activity that would otherwise be considered “criminal,”](#) just as the ignorant heterosexual couples do? According to that line of reasoning, then I guess that oppression is perfectly fine, just as long as we’re all “equally” oppressed. If they were smarter, the queers should argue that [the three-pronged test for common-law \(informal\) marriage](#) excludes them; this would still push forward their desire to be socially respected as monogamous couples while simultaneously not enabling government intrusion via licensure of marriage.

The [actual meeting itself](#) in council chambers was equal parts comedic and painful that I ended up leaving absurdly early. The opening prayer sounded like an sorry excuse for attempting to sound humanitarian by praising the wonderfulness and “love” allegedly exhibited by the council (rising for the prayer itself had the feel of being in a courtroom). There was then a series of speakers who had 3 minutes to blurt out their most important agenda items. First up was news that the local Metro (commuter train) rail line has increased ridership, with bar graphs to boot! There were also people complaining that chainsaws increased carbon footprints and thus only electric chainsaws should be allowed within the city limits since they don’t put a hole in the ozone layer (or so the tree hugger of the day said). One queer got up to solicit funding for HIV/AIDS “research,” which was promptly followed by his prostrating before the council for their beneficence in passing a resolution that even the fella himself admitted had no force of law. Another random gentleman was concerned about all the homeless bums who rummage through the garbage cans in downtown (which is pretty common); this was followed by another guy who wanted funding for “mental health services” for not only returning veterans but also their families.

Probably the most significant speaker I saw (since I didn’t stay around for the [anti-fluoridation activists](#), given I didn’t want to pay anymore than what is reasonably affordable for parking) was a middle-aged lady who mentioned that not only was the tax money that the City of Austin received from its hapless residents not necessarily staying locally, but also that the financial records for bonds were **not** transparent. To top off the city officials’ secrecy about finances (since according to her, this wasn’t the first or second time she’s asked for them), she then mentioned that were unconfirmed reports that herbicides were being dumped into the city’s water supply; she simply asked the council for confirmation or denial of these rumours.

When I approached her after she finished speaking (since she was sitting only a few seats away in the row ahead of me), she couldn’t tell me much more but what she did reveal to me was that she suspects embezzlement, considering the fact that the spreadsheets she showed me didn’t balance out at all. In regards to the herbicide dumping, she asserted there were photos but she needs more proof before she’s comfortable enough accusing anybody of anything. Considering what’s at stake, I can’t blame her. I wished her well and went on my way.

Speaking of escaping from the scum who run the place, another thing that bothered me about my visit to city hall was that there were cops *everywhere*. I remember that where I used to live, whenever I attended a city council meeting, I never saw a single flatfoot, *ever*. I felt I was at a lower security airport or football

stadium with all the [armed blue costumed government agents](#) milling about.

There was also all the huge stage lights and camera crews. Although there was a tiny bit of that from where I came from so that folks could watch on local access, here in Austin it was more like a movie set or television studio; it was quite irritating. The pandering empty platitudes that the local politicians spewed were even more fruity than the [queer pride oven mitts](#).

Overall, it's only worth going to the Austin City Council meetings if you arrive later than 10 am when they eventually get around to "[general citizen communications](#)." There is a speaker sign up sheet that you can get on ahead of time so that your name and topic can appear on the agenda. I wished I was able to stay for Ronnie Refersed, Linda Greene, and Russell Doyle [bitch about fluoridated water](#); **that** would've been fun (at least a little bit). You can also see on [today's agenda](#) all the millions upon millions of dollars that the council flagrantly wastes (such as on the [Fiesta de Independencia Foundation](#)), allocates towards the police state (such as the [Austin Regional Intelligence Center](#)), and bestows upon their corporate cronies (such as CH2M Hill, Inc). Isn't run amuck government just wonderful?