

## **Estates of Brentwood – Stone Wall Proposal (11/27/2006)**

**Intro** – This document is meant to educate, enlighten and otherwise entertain those with an interest in the proposed entrance wall for the Estates of Brentwood. This is a challenging project and one that will require intense commitment from Board members and homeowners if we are to be successful. Your Board is eager to share their progress and hear about your questions and concerns. Any email sent to [eobboard@googlegroups.com](mailto:eobboard@googlegroups.com) will be automatically forwarded to all board members.

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## **Why do we need a stone wall anyhow?**

Good question – We've had a wooden fence since the community was built in 1997, and it's served us well. Sort of .....

Perhaps the primary motivator for a stone wall is the desire to have our community viewed as distinctive and 'upscale'. Stone walls have for centuries been respected as a sign of permanence and prestige, and we hope to achieve both with our stone wall at the Estates of Brentwood.

Homes in our price range are sometimes part of large communities with amenities like playscapes, tennis courts, pools and grand entrances. We don't have those, however our community does have a tremendous amount going for it. To begin with, we are among a small number of homes which have been built within the last 10 years in the Balcones Club area. Our homes are in the Round Rock School District and our children go to excellent, top-rated schools like Spicewood Springs, Canyon Vista and the nationally recognized Westwood High School. And our location along Anderson Mill means shorter commutes to 183, Lakeline Mall and the upcoming highway 45 than for similar homes built farther out.

*Stone walls have for centuries been respected  
as a sign of permanence and prestige*

When potential buyers consider our homes they find quality construction, modern floor plans, a convenient location and excellent schools. The Estates of Brentwood offers all of these, and a well built stone wall is expected to increase property values and better position our community in comparison to other subdivisions.

## **What is required to authorize construction of the wall?**

In order to take on significant liability, as is the case with the stone wall, the authorization of at least 2/3rds of homeowners is required. The Board would like to have signed ballots from **all** homeowners indicating their support FOR or AGAINST the project.

The Board would like all homeowners to attend the upcoming community meeting at which there will be lengthy discussion of the contents of this document. At this meeting we will ask homeowners to indicate their support of the stone wall by their signature on a ballot.

Ballots FOR or AGAINST the stone wall will be accepted for up to 2 weeks after this meeting. This will allow homeowners who missed the meeting to still indicate their written support, however the Board urges homeowners to either attend the meeting or submit an absentee ballot in order to minimize the number of homeowners who Board members will need to contact individually.

## Should our HOA take care of the existing green wood fence?

The following letter was received by our President Pat O'Rourke in response to his question about this question regarding maintenance of the existing green wood fence.

From: Leon Whitney  
To: Pat O'Rourke

You asked about my original intention when I had the entrance monuments and custom designed fence built on Anderson Mill Road. These improvements were paid for by my company, **Rockledge, Inc.**, as part of the development costs of the Estates of Brentwood. The custom fence along the road was built all at once. It was not built piecemeal by the builders as they began construction of each new home as were the standard six-foot fences within this subdivision.

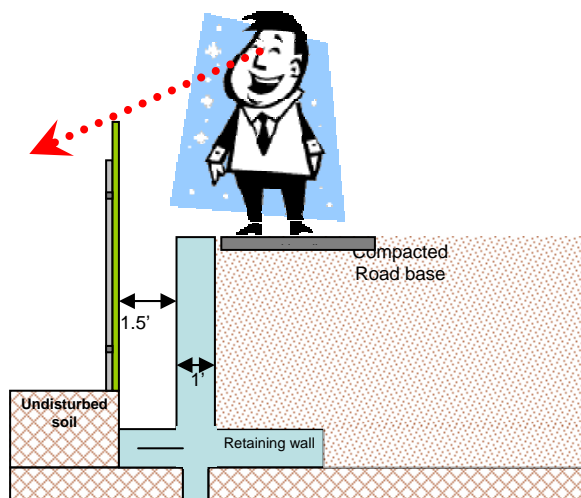
I consider the custom fence to be the property of the homeowners' association (HOA). As with other HOA property it should be maintained by the HOA. I would not consider it fair or practical to ask the individual homeowners who back to Anderson Mill Road to maintain the HOA custom fence just because it is located across the back of their lots. Otherwise, some homeowners might replace a portion of the custom fence with a different fence or paint "their section of fence" a different color which would look terrible. The HOA should keep control of this fence.

It has been Association policy to maintain and repair the existing green wooden fence since it was first constructed by the developer. There have at times been questions raised about this policy, however the summer 2006 survey showed overwhelming community support (~80% of respondents) for having the fence be kept as an Association responsibility.

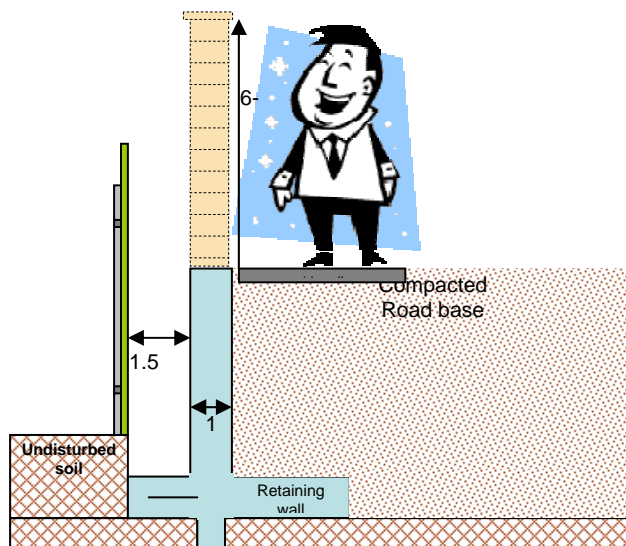
## Why do we need to build this wall now?

After construction along Anderson Mill is completed, the roadway will be elevated by up to four (4) feet above the existing grade at points along 450 feet of our fence line to the west of the entrance at Centennial Trail. Unless a new wall is built, pedestrians walking along the new sidewalk in the elevated areas will have a direct view over the existing wood fence into the backyards of homeowners along Anderson Mill Road.

The following diagram demonstrates how the new roadway will obsolete the existing wood fence, by allowing pedestrians to look over the fence, or in places to easily 'jump' over and into a homeowner's back yard.



If we build a stone wall now, we have the option to build atop the County's retaining wall, as shown by the following diagram. The County has made clear that this is a one-time offer and we must build our wall while the road is being constructed.



## **Why can't we wait until the roadwork is completed and build a wall in place of the existing wood fence?**

That's an option, but it turns out that it would be prohibitively expensive. From discussions with wall companies we've learned that walls become much more expensive as they grow in height. And as can be seen from the diagrams in the previous question, a free standing wall in place of the existing green wooden fence would need to be approximately 10-12 feet tall to provide the equivalent screening of a 6-8 foot wall built on top of the retaining wall.

We have learned the following about the relative costs of a wall versus height:

6' wall = X

8' wall = 150% \* X

10' wall = 300% \* X

12' wall = 600% \* X

In other words, the cost of a wall goes up dramatically with each foot of increased height above 6 feet. This is due to increased wall and footer thickness needed to withstand the increasing leverage which lateral wind forces have on a wall.

*We can build a shorter (and less costly) wall  
today by building on top of the County's  
retaining wall during the Anderson Mill road  
construction project.*

To summarize, by building a stone wall now on top of the County's retaining wall we can achieve affordable screening from passersby. If we build a wall along the existing fence line, the costs for a wall which provides equivalent screening will be 300-600% as high for the 450' section along the retaining wall.

## How will the wall be constructed?

The Board of Directors has had on site visits from 5 different wall construction companies. We've learned that there are many factors which affect the cost of stone walls, and there are several construction styles which are commonly used. After careful review the Board has determined that the most cost effective construction style is the Post-Tension wall system. A stone wall built with the Post-Tension system starts with threaded anchor bolts that are placed in the concrete footer. A threaded rod is connected to these bolts, and this rod extends through the top of the last course of stone. At that point a metal top plate is inserted over the threaded rod, and a nut is torqued (i.e.: tightened) to a force of 50 pounds per square inch (PSI) which results in a wall that is permanently in compression, which acts to greatly strengthen the wall. The metal top plate will be hidden by the capstones (or brick) placed at the very top of the wall, and the metal top plate will not be visible after the wall is completed.

This construction style provides much improved strength to the wall and allows a wall to be built using a single stack of stone, rather than the more common approach where two stacks are placed next to each other and cement is used to fill the gap in the middle. The single stack wall built using the Post-Tension system provides excellent strength for minimum cost.

## How long is the existing green wooden fence

There are approximately 1217 linear feet of Estates of Brentwood fencing currently located along Anderson Mill Road.



## What will the wall cost to construct ?

The following table provides a cost breakdown of all known and anticipated wall construction costs.

Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Subtotal	Description
1217	linear ft	\$ 112.00	\$136,304	Stone wall
767	linear ft	\$ 11.00	\$8,437	New footer (concrete foundation) to be poured by wall construction company
14	columns	\$ 1,212.00	\$16,968	30" brick/stone columns spaced every 100'
		\$ 3,000.00	\$3,000	Cost of design drawings, structural engineering and assistance with architectural design aspects
		\$ 2,500.00	\$2,500	Cost of independent inspections
			\$1,000	Existing fence removal
			<b>\$168,209</b>	<b>Total Cost of Stone Wall Construction</b>

Please see the next section for an explanation of how this total cost is to be paid.



## How will the costs be allocated ?

Our existing fence replacement fund has \$25,000, of which \$15,000 will be used to directly pay for wall construction. We will hold back \$10,000 so that we maintain a fence reserve, as required by our documents, so that we can pay for any future damage or maintenance related to the stone wall.

The Board has worked tirelessly to have the County compensate us for the obsolescence of our existing fence due to the elevation of the roadway, and at this point the County has agreed to pay for the costs associated with putting in the wall foundation in the areas where the wall is not built upon the County's retaining wall. This is expected to reduce wall costs by \$8437.

***Note** – We have received a verbal commitment from the County Commissioner to compensate the Estates of Brentwood for the obsolescence of a portion of our fencing. The Board has had numerous discussions with the roadway engineer about the form this compensation will take, and we believe that payment for 'work-in-kind' where the County pays for the construction of additional footer for our wall will be had. However, as of 11/27 we do not have a written commitment from the County.*

Homeowners along Anderson Mill Road will be asked to pay an additional assessment of \$20 per linear foot for the length of stone wall which will be built along their property, up to a cap of 115 feet. This additional assessment is deemed fair and reasonable because these owners will uniquely receive benefits of upgrade with the stone wall. It is the opinion of the Board that the benefit will diminish for extremely long wall lengths, so a cap has been placed to ensure that the few owners with 190+ feet fence lines do not have an undue financial hardship.

The following table details how the total cost of construction will be paid:

			<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Description</b>
			\$168,209	Total Cost of Stone Wall Construction
		-	\$15,000	Existing wall replacement fund
		-	\$8,437	County pays for new footer
		-	\$21,460	Extra assessment for 12 Amill owners (capped at 115 feet = \$2300 max per owner)
			<b>\$123,312</b>	Total EOB Base Assessment Costs (split evenly across 92 homes)
			<b>\$1,340</b>	Per Homeowner Base Assessment Costs (without financing)
			<b>\$1,400</b>	<b>Max Per Homeowner (Amount to approve)</b>
			<b>4%</b>	<b>Contingency Factor</b>

As can be seen, the Board is requesting approval of an amount which is slightly higher than the expected wall costs. This is being done to avoid needing to have another community meeting if costs are slightly higher than projected.



## What will my share of the wall cost be?

### Is financing available?

If you own a single property located on the interior of the neighborhood, you will be asked to pay a maximum of \$1400 towards the cost of the wall. The actual amount you pay will depend on whether you choose

- a) financing option with payments spread equally over 5 years
- b) pay in full by Feb 28, 2007

The following table shows the projected **Total Owed** and **Yearly Payment** (if financing is used) for property owners located along Anderson Mill Rd and on interior lots

per foot additional assessment \$ 20.00						9.25%
						5
						1
	Homeowner	Linear Feet of stone wall	Additional wall assessment	Base wall assessment	Total Owed for wall	Yearly Payment if Financed
Side	total ->					
West	11412 Monet	39	\$ 780.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 2,180.00	\$569.74
West	11416 Monet	192	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,700.00	\$966.99
West	11312 Monet	70	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 2,800.00	\$731.78
West	11412 Cez Ct	182	\$ 2,300.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,700.00	\$966.99
West	11413 Cez Ct	77	\$ 1,540.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 2,940.00	\$768.37
West	10707 Cent. Tr	81	\$ 1,620.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,020.00	\$789.28
East	11517 Rockw. Pl	73	\$ 1,460.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 2,860.00	\$747.46
East	11513 Rockw. Pl	107	\$ 2,140.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,540.00	\$925.18
East	11509 Rockw. Pl	80	\$ 1,600.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$784.05
East	11505 Rockw. Pl	111	\$ 2,220.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,620.00	\$946.09
East	11501 Rockw. Pl	105	\$ 2,100.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$914.72
East	11425 Rockw. Pl	100	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 3,400.00	\$888.59
	Interior	0	\$ -	\$ 1,400.00	\$ 1,400.00	\$365.89
	total ->	1217	\$ 21,460.00			

***NOTE –TABLE CONTAINS ESTIMATES ONLY, AND IS SUBJECT TO UPDATE ONCE EXACT FENCE LINE LENGTHS ARE PRECISELY KNOWN.***

The Board has arranged for financing at the following terms:

Rate: Prime + 1% (currently 9.25%)  
Duration 5 years  
Additional 1% origination fee + misc. filing costs

Please note that if you choose financing your total costs will be approximately 30% higher then if you choose to pay in full by February 28, 2007.

## What will my Estates of Brentwood Payments look like?

The Board plans to avoid mingling regular operating expenses with wall costs. Therefore, your annual dues of \$250 will be payable as usual in December 2006. Any dues received after Jan 10, 2007 will be considered late and will have late fees assessed.

For homeowners who wish to pay their Total Owed wall costs in full, you may do so with a one-time payment which will be due on February 28, 2007. It is **very important** that your payment be on time because the Board will be arranging financing for the remaining balance during the first week of March. Once the loan is in place there **will be no more opportunity for early payment**.

For homeowners who choose the financing option, your annual dues will continue to be payable by December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year. In addition you will be assessed a wall payment which will be due on the following dates:

- January 31, 2008
- January 31, 2009
- January 31, 2010
- January 31, 2011
- January 31, 2012

## Do you think homeowners will approve a stone wall?

The results from the summer 2006 survey showed strong support to upgrade the fencing around our neighborhood, with 37 homeowners indicating they wanted to upgrade from the current wood fencing. There were 13 homeowners who stated that they wanted to keep the existing wood fence.

Board members recognize that a few homeowners have stated that they are against the building of a stone wall. There are several different reasons why these owners do not support this project, and the Board respects the opinions of these individuals.

Based on survey results, write in comments and numerous discussions conducted with homeowners over the last few years, the Board decided to research and propose for approval plans for a distinctive stone wall. The Board believes this should be a community decision, and that the desire of a 2/3rds majority should make the ultimate call about whether or not to build the wall.

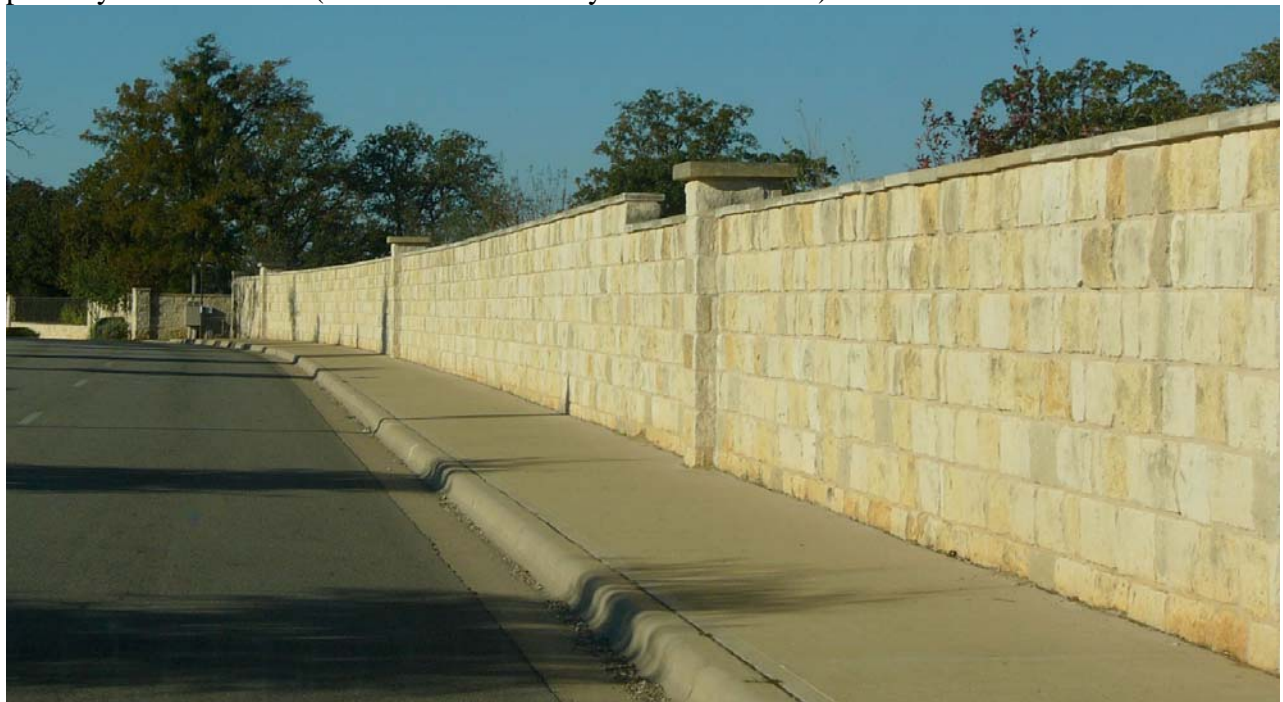
## What happens if I sell my house next year?

When considering a home, a buyer will often ask their real estate agent if the home is part of a Home Owner's Association (HOA) and if so what the dues are. If this stone wall project is approved by homeowners, you will be given an opportunity to pay your share either using a lump sum or on an installment plan over five years. If you choose the installment plan, a prospective buyer will be told that the annual dues are  $XXX + YYY$ , where  $YYY$  represents a special wall assessment. If you choose to pay your share of the wall cost up front in a lump sum, then your prospective buyer will be told that the annual dues are  $XXX$ . The exact values are represented by  $XXX$  and  $YYY$  are listed elsewhere in this document.

If the wall is approved, the Board is planning to work closely with our management company (Goodwin Associates) to insure that accurate information about annual dues is conveyed to prospective buyers. We will also be sure to post the information on our website, which we hope will be used by buyers and their real estate agents to learn about our wonderful community. The Board has worked very hard to keep annual operating costs to the very minimum, and as a result our dues are already among the lowest of similar communities in Austin.

## What will the wall look like?

The wall will be constructed using light colored, cream block limestone of varying heights and lengths. The stone used will be similar to that found in many of the homes in our neighborhood. The following photo is meant to be representative of the type of wall which will be built. The design for our wall is planned to include a top cap of brick (2 rows high) and brick columns, possibly with an accent (column details have yet to be finalized).



## **How can you put a wall on County property? Or on private homeowner property?**

This question has been intensely debated among Board members. Through these discussions and through discussions with the County we have determined that it is not unusual for private property such as a fence to be located on County property. The County has provisions in place which allow for this, and there are numerous examples elsewhere in the city of Austin where a wall or entrance monument has been built upon County property.

The existing wood fence line has been determined (through County surveys) to actually meander back and forth along the line separating County and private homeowner property, so even our existing fence is in places located on County land.

It would have been simpler had our developer deeded the land on which the fence currently sits to our Homeowners Association, however this was not done in our subdivision, and has not been done in other subdivisions that we've contacted

What's the bottom line? The Board believes that it is entirely legal and practical to maintain the existing wood fence, or to build a replacement wood fence or stone wall in essentially the same location.

## **Will the wall be insured?**

Yes. The existing green wooden fence and brick entrance monuments are presently insured at a yearly cost of \$932 with a \$1,000 deductible.

The estimated cost to insure the brick monuments and proposed stone wall for \$100,000 is \$1259, which represents a yearly increase of \$327 over our existing fence-related insurance costs.

## **What happens if the wall is damaged by a car or 'tagged' by vandals?**

Our HOA currently carries liability insurance for the wood fence. The new insurance policy will have a \$1,000 deductible, so damage above that amount will be covered by insurance.

## **What is being done to ensure the wall will be attractive?**

The Board plans to use a design architect for basic consultation on the design of the columns. We have set a low dollar limit of \$3,000 to ensure these costs remain contained. Some options being considered for the wall include a brick top course along the entire length, use of brick and stone in the columns, and column accents like a granite keystone, elegant letter “B”, and possibly provisions for down lighting at each column which could be installed in the future.

## **How will the wall affect our property values?**

This is a hard question to answer with any specific dollar value. It's easy to envision that there will be an increase of property values when prospective buyers associate our stone wall with permanence, elegance, distinction and class. Will these translate into a \$1 per sq/ft increase in property values? Or \$2 or more? This question is impossible to answer. A \$1 increase would represent \$2500 to \$4000 for each house (depending on size) when sold.

The Board has asked for input from Realtors and we have consistently been told that a stone wall will make a significant impact on potential home buyers.

*I personally and professionally feel your neighborhood would best be served to replace the fence with a higher quality concrete or stone – Dorie Dillard*

## **Will the green fence along Centennial Trail be replaced?**

No – After significant discussion the Board consensus is that there is a significant benefit to having a distinctive stone wall along Anderson Mill Road, and a lesser benefit to extending that same wall down along Centennial trail. While it would be attractive and appropriate, the Board is extremely sensitive to cost and has decided that replacing the original green wood fence along Centennial Trail with a stone wall is not in the best interests of the neighborhood.

The wood fence is presently looking dilapidated however the Board believes it can be refreshed with a new coat of paint. We will consider improving the landscaping in this area as well.

## **Will homeowners along the new wall pay more than those on interior lots?**

Yes - The homeowners along Anderson Mill Road are thought to receive a benefit beyond those which all homeowners will receive. The Board believes this merits an additional assessment of \$20/linear foot with a cap at 115 feet. The cap affects two homeowners, and is intended to prevent their additional assessment from being an undue hardship because of their extremely long fence lines (about 190 feet).

## **Homeowners along Anderson Mill Rd. paid less for their homes, is it fair they get a stone wall now?**

Contrary to the opinion of some, the original purchasers of homes along Anderson Mill Road paid only slightly less (approximately \$6,000) than purchasers of homes in the interior of the neighborhood.

The Board believes that house values are set by willing buyers and willing sellers, and that there is no plausible reason to consider whether homeowners along Anderson Mill Road have already received a benefit related to the existing fence.

Given the location of the fence it is unavoidable that these homeowners will receive a benefit of a stone wall in their back or side yards. The Board has carefully considered this and decided that it is fair and reasonable for these homeowners to pay an additional assessment. The exact amount was determined after lengthy discussion by the Board.

The Board is most concerned with providing value for the entire neighborhood, and hopes that the additional assessment will be viewed fair and reasonable by most homeowners.

## **How is the County involved in this work**

The road widening project is being run by Travis County engineers. The Board has had numerous discussions with both the County project manager and the Commissioner in order that we remain aware of new developments.

## **What is the timeline for the road construction**

Construction began in early October 2006 and is tentatively planned to last about 18 months. The area in front of the Estates of Brentwood is among the first to be worked, as is evidenced by the piles of dirt, stone and equipment already being used along our frontage area.

## **What is the timeline for the wall construction**

If the stone wall is approved by the neighborhood, wall construction could start as early as January 15, 2007. The project can be expected to take 3-4 months.

## **How are we protected if the wall has problems in the future**

By using licensed professionals who will sign off on the wall's design with their signature and professional stamp, we will have some protection if there is a defect due to poor design. We will have a short (1 year) warranty from the wall company.

## **I'd like to help out – what can I do?**

The Board is seeking volunteers with experience in construction projects. We welcome anyone with such experience, or anyone with design experience who is willing to help with the aesthetic aspects of the wall's design.