

Environmental venture seeks

COMMUNITY SUPPORT


NBU is funding half of the total project that will restore a former industrial site back to its natural habitat.

About \$6M spent on Phase 1

\$10.88M remaining goal

\$25.5M total estimated project cost

\$14.63M raised so far



New Braunfels Utilities is working to complete the environmental restoration of a 16-acre site situated along the Comal Springs.

NBU seeks community support for Headwaters project

Officials say transformation of industrial site will reduce runoff pollution into the Comal River

BY **RACHEL NELSON**

Along the fault line that separates the Texas Hill Country from the Texas Coastal Plain, the largest freshwater spring system in Texas emerges from the ground in New Braunfels.

New Braunfels Utility owns the 16-acre spot in the northwest part of

town where the spring waters manifest and continue through Landa Park to feed the Comal River. From 1940-2004, the property was used by NBU as a fleet and facilities yard, but the company is currently spearheading a \$25.5 million project to transform the human-altered site back to

its natural form.

“NBU has shown that they live up to their mission and vision,” said Nancy Pappas, managing director for the Headwaters at the Comal project.

“Part of that is to be a good steward of the resources that they have

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Hill Country groups wanting more local land-use control

BY **RACHEL NELSON**

As the second fastest-growing county in the country according to U.S. Census Bureau data, Comal County, like others in the Hill Country, is coming face to face with industries that want to set up shop on land that is becoming more and more precious.

Annalisa Peace, executive director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and a registered state lobbyist, cites incompatible land use as the reason why the GEAA and other groups in the region hope to resurrect a bill in

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STIRRING DUST AND CONTROVERSY

In hopes of operating a rock quarry, Vulcan Materials Co. applied for an air-quality permit that will allow it to mine

60%

of a 1,500-acre property in New Braunfels.

SOURCE: VULCAN MATERIALS CO./COMMUNITY IMPACT NEWSPAPER

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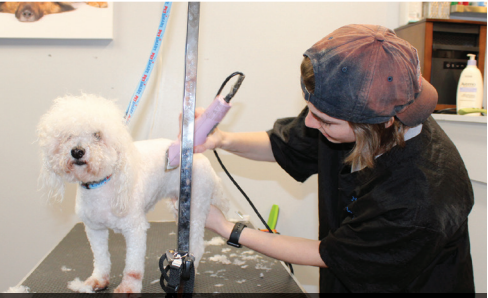
3009

1863

Not mined

Mined

Map not to scale



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Las Fontanas Mexican Kitchen

A LARGE UNDERTAKING

The Headwaters at the Comal project has been broken down into four phases. When complete, the Headwaters at the Comal project will include several overlooks, trails and bioswales, which are landscaped elements designed to concentrate or remove debris and pollution out of surface runoff water.

--- Trails

PHASE 1

Timeline: Completed in November 2017

After master plan development and project design were completed, Phase 1 focused on restoring the native landscape and incorporating observation areas and an outdoor classroom.

Includes:

- 1 Trails
- 2 Overlooks
- 3 Public sidewalk
- 4 Bioswale
- 5 Raptor perch
- 6 Bridges
- 7 Springs observation area
- 8 Outdoor classroom

PHASE 2

Timeline: Projected for completion in 2021

This phase centers around restoration of remaining buildings into event space, conference rooms and education spaces as well as signage and parking.

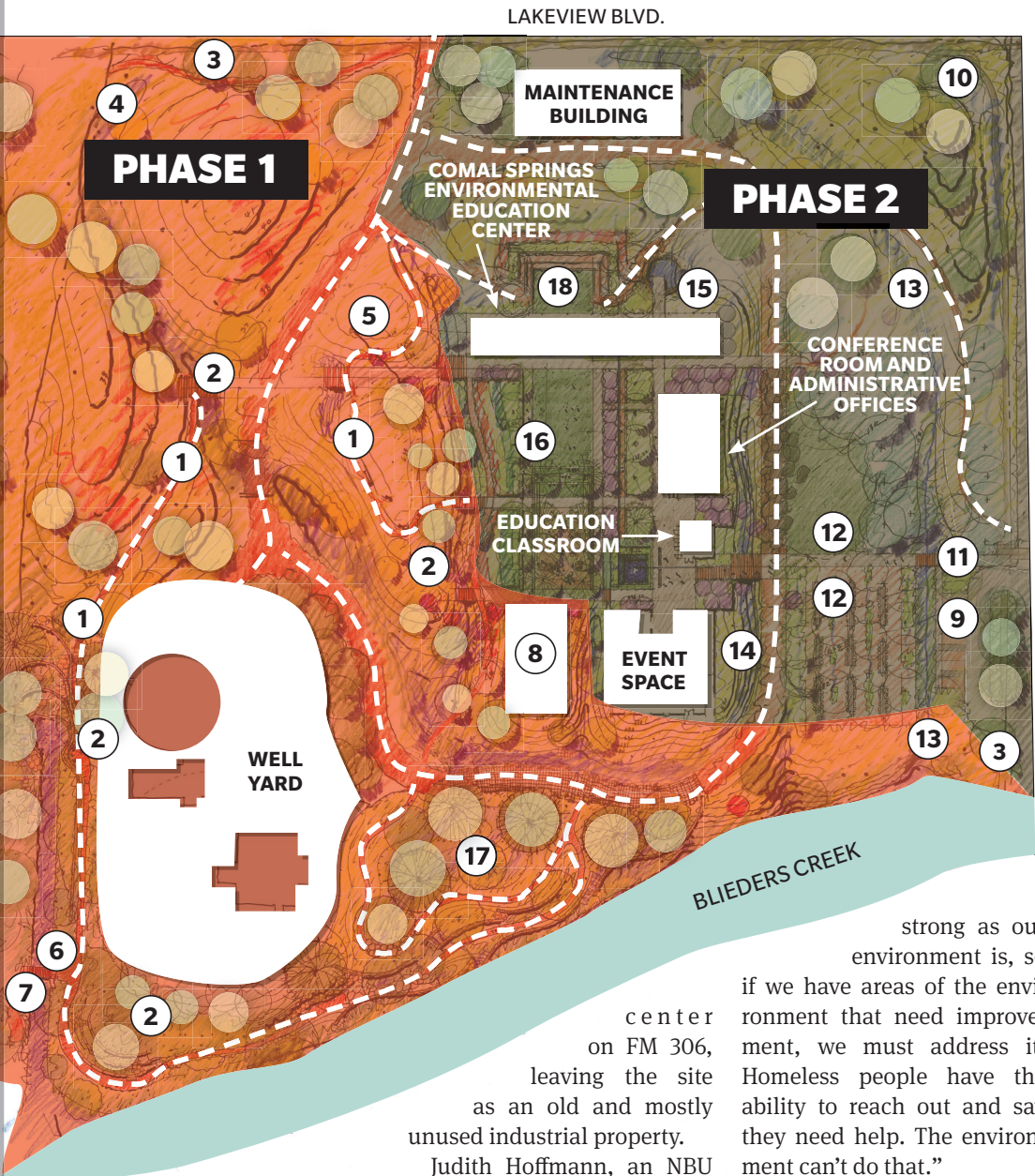
Includes:

- 9 Parking areas
- 10 Monumental signage
- 11 Entry promenade
- 12 Gardens
- 13 Bioswale
- 14 Rainwater cisterns
- 15 Harvested rainwater reflecting pool
- 16 Inner courtyard
- 17 Water retention area and ephemeral wetland
- 18 Terraced garden amphitheater

Headwaters at the Comal

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www.headwatersatthecomal.com



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and to be a good community partner.”

The idea for the Headwaters at the Comal environmental restoration project began after NBU outgrew the location in 2004 and moved its operations to the current service

center on FM 306, leaving the site as an old and mostly unused industrial property.

Judith Hoffmann, an NBU board member and professor at Texas Lutheran University, teaches social entrepreneurship, a subject that addresses ways to build up the poorest people in a community for the greater good.

“The environment is the same way,” she said. “Our community can be only as

strong as our environment is, so if we have areas of the environment that need improvement, we must address it. Homeless people have the ability to reach out and say they need help. The environment can’t do that.”

When the site is finished, Pappas said there will be a 94 percent annual reduction of pollutants that flow from the rainwater surrounding the site into the springs.

“Close to 12,000 pounds of [pollutants] in a normal rain year go into the Comal springs,” she said. “A

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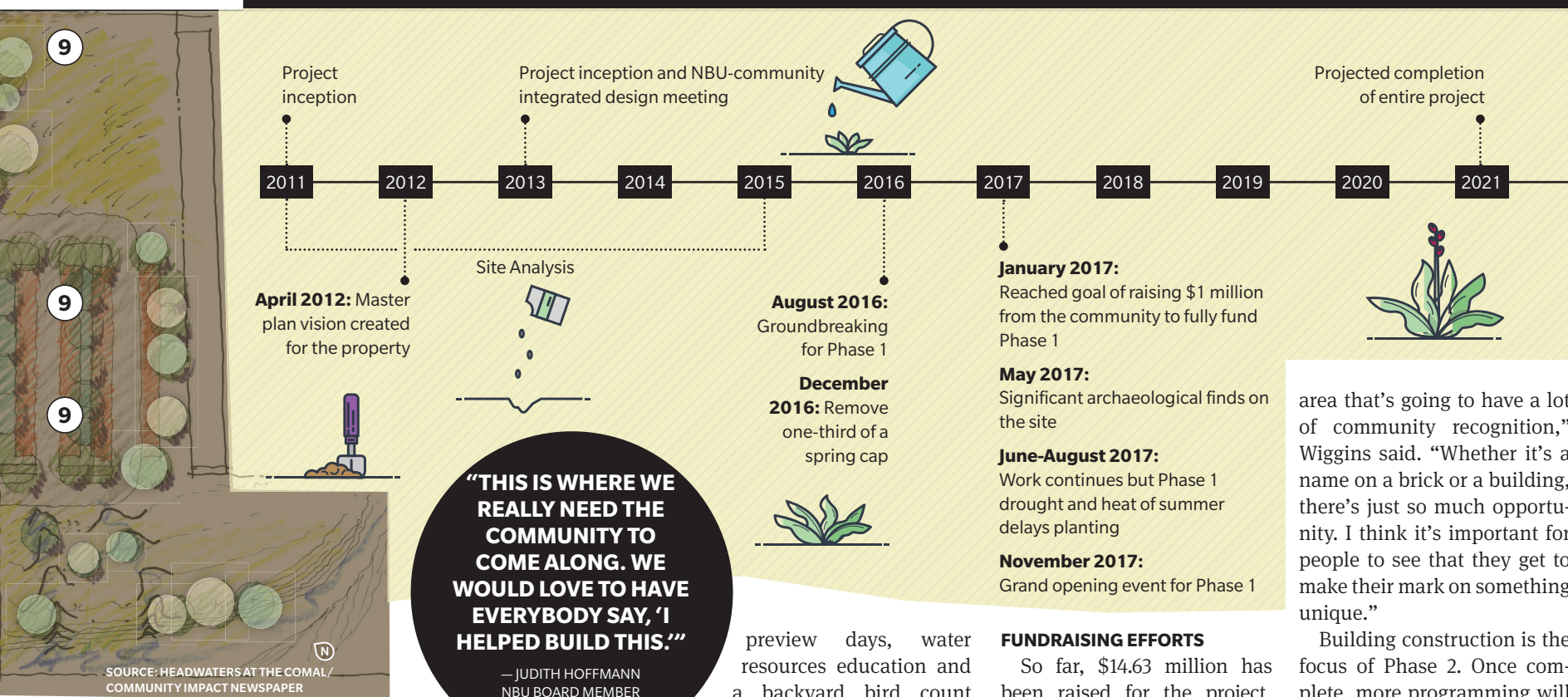


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WHERE IT BEGINS

The first phase of the Headwaters of the Comal project has been completed, and the timing of the remaining phases depends largely on fundraising efforts.



significant effort was made into understanding the hydrology of this site and the way the water flows across it and then coming up with natural ways to slow that water down and channel it the way we want to go and have the native plants and grasses clean it through their root systems before it gets back into the spring system."

THE FIRST PHASE

NBU worked with San Antonio-based Lake | Flato Architects to create a vision for the Headwaters project.

During the 1930s, federal funding was used to put people to work cleaning up the Comal springs area and walling it off,

eventually capping one of the springs. Phase 1 of the Headwaters project began in August 2016 with removing one-third of the spring cap to allow the environment to function naturally. The Comal Springs is home to four endangered species that will better be able to thrive as a result.

Phase 1 wrapped up in November 2017 and included landscape restoration, implementing site utilities, incorporating spring-run observation areas and constructing an outdoor classroom.

Some programming has started, such as community

preview days, water resources education and a backyard bird count collaboration that uses citizen science to help scientists understand what is happening with birds in local communities.

Unearthing the site has also provided a unique opportunity for scientific discovery that gives insight into the past.

"The last 1,000 years isn't really here because it's all been removed, but the older archaeology (is here)," Papas said.

Some evidence of ancient habitation that has been discovered so far are rock ovens and tools, which are the property of the Texas Historic Commission. In the future, NBU will be able to borrow the artifacts and display them.

FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

So far, \$14.63 million has been raised for the project, including an \$11.6 million contribution from NBU. An additional \$10.88 million is needed to complete the project.

"This is where we really need the community to come along," Hoffmann said. "We would love to have everybody say, 'I helped build this,' from kids with their pennies to a wealthy person who says, 'Here's \$10 million.'"

Pat Wiggins has invested in several properties in New Braunfels, including the downtown McAdoo's Seafood Co. and the Headwaters project. He said Phase 2 is going to take sizeable donations from individuals and institutional investors.

"I just foresee this being an

area that's going to have a lot of community recognition," Wiggins said. "Whether it's a name on a brick or a building, there's just so much opportunity. I think it's important for people to see that they get to make their mark on something unique."

Building construction is the focus of Phase 2. Once complete, more programming will be introduced that educates the community about water, recycling projects and other environmental topics. The final phase will also add monumental and wayfinding signage, additional trails, landscaping and parking.

While New Braunfels is known for Schlitterbahn and Wurstfest, Hoffmann hopes the Headwaters at the Comal will one day top the list.

"It's almost as if, if [the Headwaters] could talk, I can almost hear it saying, 'Thank you, because you have restored me back to health,'" she said.

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