

Bonfire 2002

ACTUAL AND PROPOSED COSTS FOR BONFIRE 2002

Phase One

July 2000 to Dec. 15, 2001, total cost: \$229,450
Engineering/safety consultant services proposal marketing

Phase Two

Dec. 15, 2001 to Feb. 1, 2002, total cost: \$32,500
Engineering/Safety consultant services

Phase Three

Projected total: \$2,221,455
Liability insurance for consultants, students and staff; University Bonfire staff pay, training, security, cleanup, engineering services and deliverables and other unanticipated costs

Total projected cost: \$2,483,405

Source: The Bonfire 2002 Planning Committee

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Decision

Continued from page 1

Bonfire design met Bowen's parameters, the steering committee was aware of Turner's inability to obtain insurance since they signed on to the project in November, Cole said.

"(Turner) wanted to make this happen, but they just couldn't find a firm to underwrite their liability," Cole said.

But task force members remained optimistic until the last few days as the project began to unravel with Turner's withdrawal and the revised cost estimates, Cole said.

Bowen, who will step down as president in June, declined to say whether Bonfire should be held in the future, and said his decision not to have Bonfire was a difficult one.

"My heart does not like what my brain is doing today," Bowen said. "It would be irresponsible of me to listen to my heart when we are dealing with the safety of our students."

He said students should face the inevitable and focus their energies on

creating a new tradition that replicates the camaraderie of Bonfire but does not entail the danger and expense.

Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. J. Malon Southerland said it is unlikely the next president will continue Bonfire.

"I don't see that happening, not with the facts that are sitting before me," Southerland said.

In a tearful statement following Bowen's announcement, Student Body President Schuyler Houser, who worked on the Bonfire steering committee, said she respected Bowen's decision, but was still deeply disappointed with the outcome.

"It feels like everything fell down again," Houser said. "At the outset, there was no doubt the answer would be yes, but our plan couldn't overcome the facts."

She said students must come to terms with the decision and not hurl bitter accusations at administrators.

"This is a dark day, but A&M was here before Bonfire and it will be here after Bonfire," Houser said.

Nov. 18, 1999

Aggie Bonfire collapse, 2:42 a.m. 12 Aggies die, 27 injured

May 2, 2000

Commission report released, blames "tunnel vision" of University administration

June 16, 2000

Bowen places Bonfire on a moratorium until 2002

Oct, 2000

Planning for Bonfire 2002 begins

Jan 28, 2002

Bonfire 2002 committee chooses final design

Feb 4, 2002

Bowen says no to Bonfire 2002

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Reaction

Continued from page 1

For Fall 2001, once again a freshman biomedical science major after a long recovery — a year and a half in intensive physical therapy.

During his first days on campus, Comstock said he was

going to light Bonfire 2002. This fall, he said he knew a revamped Bonfire would not be the same, but it would help people move on after the 1999 collapse.

Now, he said, "it sucks," explaining that even if there was a Bonfire this fall for him to work on, his mother would not allow it.

"It's just a shame," Comstock

said Monday. "I know the parents [of the victims] probably wanted one as much as their kids would have."

Sean Breen, an Austin attorney and brother of Bonfire victim Christopher David Breen, said his family has mixed opinions about Bowen's decision to call an end to the Bonfire tradition.

"We understand how important that tradition is and how people like my little brother would have liked to see it still," Breen said. "We weren't sure what to expect ... we know how emotionally charged this is, but

if they cannot do it safely, then they shouldn't do it at all."

The Breens brought a lawsuit against Texas A&M and five of its top administrators this fall, claiming administrators encouraged participation in an activity they knew was dangerous.

Forth Worth attorney Darrell Keith's law firm represents the families of collapse victims Jerry Don Self, Christopher Lee Heard and Bryan McClain, as well as injured students Matthew Robbins and Dominique Braus.

Keith said in a statement

released on behalf of his clients,

"We believe that since the Texas A&M Bonfire was safely built at one time, with proper safety precautions it can safely be built again. Our clients believe that the attempt by the Texas A&M administration to blame them for the decision to discontinue bonfire in 2002 is an irresponsible and thinly veiled attempt to shift the focus from the safety issues that should control the decisions to blaming the victims."

Keith said he thinks a safe Bonfire is possible.

"It's hard to imagine that a

school like Texas A&M, one that teaches engineering and architecture students how to build skyscrapers, bridges ... and off-shore drilling rigs, can't plan to build a safe Bonfire," Keith said.

Students who stayed behind in the Flagroom to hear the rest of Bowen's speech said they wanted to understand why Bowen was ending the tradition. Most students said they were disappointed, though the reasons behind Bowen's decision were sound.

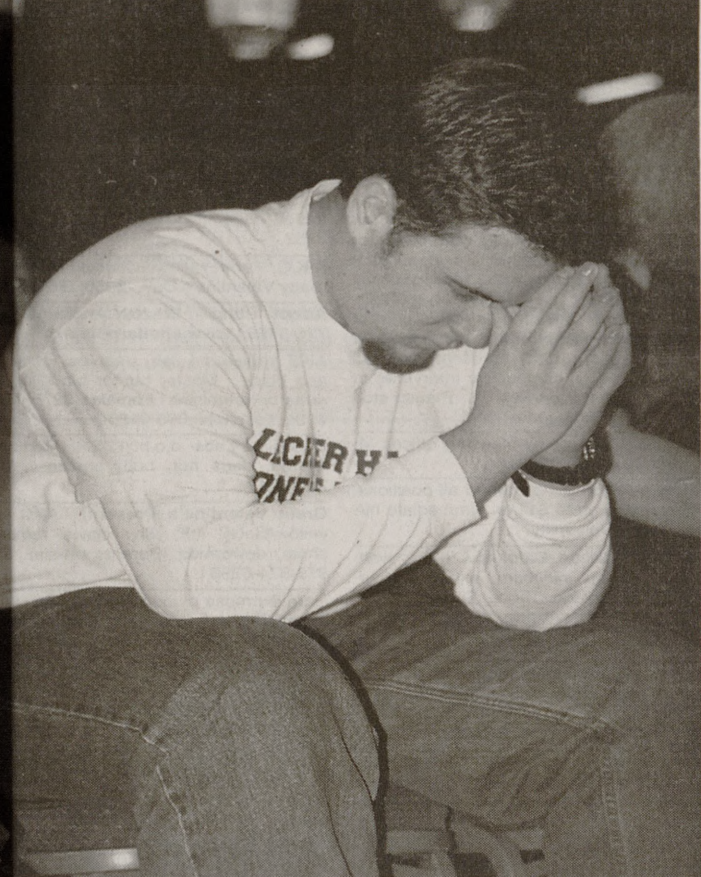
"I feel like with the overwhelming amount of support for Bonfire from students and former students, that we were kind of overlooked in the making this decision," said Kathylee Witwiski, a sophomore psychology major.

Bret McGowen, a junior computer science major, said Bowen's decision is hard to stomach.

"I think the Aggie community wants it so badly, and I'd like to believe that Bowen wants it also," McGowen said. "It's hard to believe that our only option is nothing and it can't be done in some way, no matter how minor."

McGowen, like most students, envisions more off-campus bonfires to replace the University-sanctioned event most students and alumni were expecting to round out the annual game with the University of Texas this Thanksgiving.

"This was the University's opportunity to mandate that they be in charge of this, so now it will be a kind of a rogue deal," McGowen said.



PHOTOS BY ALISSA HOLLIMAN • THE BATTALION



Left: Junior mechanical engineering major Ben Ronck reacts to Bowen's decision to cancel Bonfire 2002. Above: Junior management major Sophie Olyniec hugs her roommate, Kristin West, a sophomore biomedical sciences major, who lost her brother in the 1999 Bonfire collapse.

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