

HISTORICAL LANDMARK COMMISSION BOARD

My name is Teresa Wilson and I was the owner of Aquarelle Restaurant located at 606 Rio Grande St. I am writing this to the board in hopes of explaining the disappearance of the columns on March 23, 2013. I am sorry to not have done this sooner but I have had sick children in the house for the past two weeks!

My husband contacted Cirrus Logic to inquire about any renovation to the building and found out the house was not a good fit for their purposes and was to be demolished. He asked about the contents and if we could have access to them and Cirrus Logic graciously agreed. They also granted us access to the house on the weekend as that was our only free time. They agreed and went out of their way to have someone meet us and unlock the building. We were responsible for returning the keys later that evening.

On Saturday, our "construction crew" of my husband and two friends who had worked many hours on repairs of the old home in the past, showed up to pull out the antique bar that we had custom made for us, a fryer from the massive custom cook top, and two custom stone tops we had installed. From the outside, we took down the bird house which was a mini replica of the restaurant/house, the ornamental grasses, the transom over the front doors which had Aquarelle etched, the flower boxes we had reconstructed, 4 acorns, and four columns.

While we were working that late morning, the City of Austin Gas Company came by and verified the 606 address. They were scheduled to cut the gas meter for final removal.

Around 2:30 that afternoon, Mr. Sift stopped by while we were finishing up with the columns. He had a brief conversation with my husband who explained who we were and why we were there. Someone called the police, the police came and we had to call the security guard at Cirrus to come down to the property and let them know it was ok for us to be on the property.

We stopped working on the outside and moved inside to finish removing the fryer. This took about an hour or so. Mr. Sift returned as we were securing the trucks and commented he was surprised to still see us there. We told him we were just securing the trucks and would be finished soon.

Through the day, we were all filled with emotion. At the very end, when Mr. Sift arrived, we were sitting in the back yard having a refreshment while talking about the past and all the many good memories. My two older daughters worked at the restaurant and my two younger ones were raised there, and I probably spent more time there than at home. We were very attached to the sweet home. We wanted to save as much as we could and the columns we thought would go to each of our children for their homes one day.

Cirrus Logic has been cast in a negative light because of their act of kindness toward me, the sentimentalist. We misunderstood the stage of final approval for the removal of the home and had we understood this, we would not have removed the exterior elements.

Their kindness has cost them a negative image. I write this to support Cirrus Logic who has done no wrong. Many years ago, when the zoning was changed and approved for the property across the street from 606 Rio Grande to become a 32 story high rise, the ball started to move toward this outcome. I started receiving offers on our property immediately after the zoning was changed for the property across the street but turned them down.

I understand the neighborhoods' concern for keeping a property like this in the original city. I ask, where was the neighborhood when they had a business who loved and cared for the home? How about the TCAD who didn't care if a business could sustain the yearly increasing tax liability?

After 11 years of hard work, I decided to change concepts to meet the current needs of the area. I wanted to do easier cuisine and a more casual environment which fit better with the younger clientele. After I made the announcement of closing Aquarelle, we received the final offer. Many partners were at a stage where they needed the money and I was forced to sell. I cried many tears for this loss. I had to come to terms with the reality of my dreams, desires and place in life aren't always the same for others and it doesn't make the others bad or awful for feeling or being different.

Cirrus Logic is a successful and growing company who has made a positive impact on the Austin community. They can afford to buy downtown and to pay the taxes. I am sorry the old home is not suited for their purposes but that doesn't make them wrong for having to make a tough decision to remove it. Relocation of a sweet old home who has been renovated to a restaurant, with several large penetrations in the roof, thick mud set tile in a large kitchen area with a heavy massive cook unit, hardwood floors buffed down to the last layer is probably not the easiest candidate to find a new home. If this is not possible, then I did want to hang on to pieces of the past that brought me so much joy. I am sorry for any wrong doing and will be accountable for our actions.