

October 21, 2013

Planning and Development Review Department
Historic Landmark Commission
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767-1088

Attn: Steve.Sadowsky@austintexas.gov

Re: Historic Case Number: HDP-2013-0528
Review Case Number: PR-13-067317

Dear Commission Members:

I am the owner of the property designated as 1507 Richcreek Road, the lot that is immediately adjacent to the west of the property that is the subject of this permit application.

The house located at 1501 Richcreek may have been a very attractive residence some years ago, but it has been unoccupied and neglected for several years. The fence along the westerly boundary of the property is falling down and requires attention. Currently, there is an empty swimming pool on the property that could present a potential danger. My question for those opposing this permit application is what will happen to this property over the next few years if the demolition permit is not granted? Should the neighborhood be willing to gamble on that outcome?

Like it or not, Crestview is in transition. One can cite numerous instances where property owners have chosen to renovate existing structures and other instances where the existing structures have been demolished and replaced. Such activity is going on all the time and Crestview is better for it. Whether renovating or opting for new construction, neither decision is wrong. The owners are simply exercising their private property rights. In my view, it is those private property rights that are paramount and worth preserving. There is no doubt that some residents may regard 1501 Richcreek as more attractive than other homes that have already been demolished. However, subjective opinion with regard to a building's appearance is completely irrelevant when it comes to establishing either historical or architectural significance.

As an individual with a deep interest in history and tradition, I would be leading the parade to preserve a residence or other structure in this neighborhood possessing true historical value. However, simply re-naming an initiative that began as opposition to razing the "Frank Richcreek" House to the more evocative "Save the McKown House," does not automatically create or bestow historical significance.

I have no objection to this permit application and appreciate the Commission's consideration of my views.

Very truly yours,

Fred C. Bosse

October 23, 2013

Planning and Development Review Department
Historic Landmark Commission
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767-1088

Attn: Steve.Sadowsky@austintexas.gov

Re: Historic Case Number: HDP-2013-0528; Review Case Number: PR-13-067317

Dear Commission Members:

Please regard this as a supplement to my letter of October 21, already submitted for your consideration in the above-referenced matter. It is likely that you will be receiving a Resolution submitted by the Crestview Neighborhood Plan Contact Team (NPCT) that supports designation of the house located at 1501 Richcreek Road as a historic landmark.

It appears to me that this NPCT Resolution is the product of a hastily called – and likely, insufficiently noticed – meeting held on Monday evening, October 21, at the Crestview Methodist Church. During his opening comments, the organizer of the meeting related that the positions on the Crestview NPCT were currently vacant and had remained vacant for “about two years.” He went on to explain that the terms for two of the three officers to be elected that evening would expire in six months, and that new elections would be held. I happened to receive an e-mail from a neighbor earlier in the day advising that “a meeting” would be taking place, but was not able to find any other evidence of a prior notice posted that such a meeting had been scheduled or was about to be held.

During the meeting, it became very clear that the majority of those in attendance had already determined their position regarding the real purpose for which the meeting had been called. Indeed, the Facilitator and Vice Facilitator, who had been just been elected, demonstrated clearly that they were much more interested in advocating their personal positions before the group than serving as objective facilitators to encourage and guide the discussion among those assembled. Any comment that questioned the wisdom or efficacy of historical designation for the subject property was quickly refuted or otherwise dismissed.

What should have been a considered and reasoned debate among neighbors with differing views became, instead, nothing more than a cacophony that was long on opinion and short on fact. As a result, I am less constrained in offering my own opinion that the NPCT meeting held in Crestview on Monday evening was actually more of a “kangaroo court,” held for the purpose of executing a thinly disguised strategy to advance the interests of a small group in order to influence the Commission prior to your October 28 meeting. I understand there are approximately 1800 residents in Crestview. The Resolution, prepared conveniently in advance by the meeting organizer, was approved by a vote of 20-6. It should not be regarded as truly representative of the entire neighborhood’s position.

Very truly yours,

Fred C. Bosse
1507 Richcreek Road

To: Steve Sadowsky and members of the Historic Landmark Commission
Re: Demo application for 1501 Richcreek

I am writing to support staff's recommendation for this property.

I am enjoying my 11th year as a Crestview resident, I live in a 1,000 s.f. house that looks pretty much the same as it did back in 1952. Like many of my neighbors, I often walk by the house at 1501 Richcreek on my way to the Minimax. I was always curious as to why it sat vacant for so long.

I have to share that I do not think this house is particularly beautiful or remarkable, nor have I ever had aspirational thoughts about owning it one day.

The idea that this house could be designated a City of Austin Historic Landmark is frankly bemusing to me, and I think many casual viewers would agree.

To be blunt, it's my opinion that to award Landmark status to the house at 1501 Richcreek might make a mockery of the entire program.

I understand that cases like this one can be challenging. I have previously served on boards and commissions [Residential Design and Compatibility Commission and the Board of Adjustment] so I know what it is like to be surprised by emotional testimony about a case. It is my hope that you've had some time to reflect on things this past month and that you are re-committed to approaching your decision on this item with the clarity of discernment I know you are capable of.

In closing, I feel it's pertinent to acknowledge that the decision about whether or not to 'save' the house at 1501 Richcreek is in the hands of its owner. Your purview is unambiguous; that is to determine whether or not the house merits designation as a City of Austin Historic Landmark. It is my opinion that the clear answer to that question is NO.

regards,

Heidi Goebel
7505 Grover Avenue

Good Morning Steve,

Here is more information about the efforts of this small minority in the Crestview neighborhood and their attempt to railroad the processes set up by the City of Austin for neighborhood representation. Below is an email for a Crestview neighbor in support of the demo permit who went to the meeting last night. Again, I don't think this is what the City of Austin had in mind when they created the Crestview Neighborhood Planning Contact Team. (CNPCT)

I'm assuming the CNPCT was designed to represent the entire neighborhood and not just a few. I think it's important that the Commission is aware that this recommendation by the "CNPCT" is in fact a recommendation by the exact same neighbors that have already voiced their opinions and does not represent the neighborhood voice.

Thank you,
Lori Smyth

Begin forwarded message:

From: Rick Von Flatern <RFlatern@slb.com>
Subject: RE: 1501 Richcreek Road Historic Commission Meeting 10/28
Date: October 22, 2013 8:37:17 AM CDT
To: Lori Smyth Design <lori@lorismythdesign.com>

Lori,

It pains me to report that the meeting resulted in a resolution by majority vote to recommend to the commission that the property be designated a historic home. It was a sham. Chip packed the place with supporters who made such eloquent arguments as "I remember walking by that place on my way home from school,"; they were irrational and emotional and, in my opinion, un-American in their disregard for personal property rights. I don't know what the designation means in terms of restricting what you can do, other than you cannot demo the place, but I hope you will continue with a project of some sort. Having looked at your website, I am anxious to see what you come up with.

Regards,
Rick

From: cadyn digiovanni <cadynhd@gmail.com>
Date: October 15, 2013, 2:54:46 PM CDT
To: lori@lorismythdesign.com
Subject: letter of support

I fully support the approval of the demolition application for 1501 Richcreek. The house was built in 1951 and does not serve any historical importance aside from a wealthy individual residing in it at one time. Since then the house has become dilapidated, it is beyond repair and likely poses a health risk to inhabitants it serves the neighborhood better to create a new structure. As a resident of the Crestview/Brentwood community, I fully support the new owner's efforts to rebuild. I have seen her previous work and believe that through much communication with the neighbors she has a good understanding of the desire for the new build to blend in with the spirit of the neighborhood. Please release the permit and allow Ms. Smyth to move on with her project.

Thank you,
Cadyn DiGiovanni

Mr Sadowsky,

Just wanted to add my two cents to this conversation. Seems there is a radical movement by Crestview residents who are afraid of development in our little neighborhood. Granted that David Weekly has somehow manage to build several large monstrosities that do in fact detract from the character and charm of the neighborhood, but that's no reason to stomp on property rights under the guise of saving a neglected home from demolition under the pretense of historical designation. This house is no more historical than the 183/Mopac overpass. In fact, it is by definition a monstrosity of itself, sitting squarely on THREE lots.

I've viewed the owner's website and some of the houses that she has previously completed. I think they would fit perfectly into the neighborhood.

I've owned my home in Crestview for almost 10 years and I would welcome Ms. Smyth to come tear down some of the old houses on my street.

1501 is NOT historic!

Thanks for your time.

Steve Dobie

From: sherri nemecek <snemecek@hotmail.com>
Subject: Richcreek house
Date: October 24, 2013 5:18:27 PM CDT
To: "lori@lorismythdesign.com" <lori@lorismythdesign.com>

I have live on Pasadena since 1989. There was a sweet elderly couple that lived there. In the early to mid nineties, they developed the "bad" mold throughout the house and had to move out due to mold induced illnesses. The insurance company paid to redo all of the drywall and add new flooring. However, they did not replace any of the windows or window seals. I took my brother in law over to look inside the windows of the house and we saw the black mold growing at the abutment of the glass and window frame. This house has had mold for years. The house has not been kept up and is a huge eye sore. If you need other neighbors who have knowledge of this, let me know. Good luck.

Sherri

From: Steve Dobie <sd0bie1@gmail.com>
Subject: Your Crestview house plans :-)
Date: October 7, 2013 7:08:13 PM CDT
To: lorismyth@cox.net

Hi Lori,

I've read about your plans on the Crestview ListServe and I think another neighbor had reached out to you inquiring what you had in store for the property at 1501 Richcreek. That person shared your response and I looked at what you have done in your other projects through your website.

Without going into my disdain for some of the monstrosities that local builders have pushed onto our little neighborhood, I'll just say that I admire your work and fully support what I think you have planned. I would only ask that you make an effort to donate some of the reusable building materials

that won't be otherwise recycled to our local Austin Habitat ReStore to further their mission of working to reduce poverty housing in Austin.

I wish you much success and apologize for the extra hoops some of my neighbors are putting you through. Look forward to see your work.

And I'm happy to provide any support you need. I'm writing a separate letter to the ListServe as well as reaching out to the City to voice my support for your project (and individual property rights in general!).

Regards,
Steve Dobie
512-569-3370

From: Leon Rhodes <rhodesl@gmail.com>
Subject: NCT meeting
Date: October 22, 2013 8:43:44 AM CDT
To: Lori Smyth Design <lori@lorismythdesign.com>

Hi Lori,

I went to the neighborhood contact team meeting last night and while of course the majority there voted to suggest historic classification (as is common in such things only those that felt strongly about the issue showed up, I'm sure if there were a way to put it to an entire neighborhood vote there is no way it would have passed as nearly everyone would have just abstained) I must admit I just can't see how it will actually meet the legal requirements to happen. It is abundantly clear to me that, while some may consider the front of the house a bit of a landmark (and I really do have my doubts about that), the supposed "Historical association" of the Mckown family is questionable at best.

Looking at the requirements:

Historical Associations. The property has long-standing significant associations with persons, groups, institutions, businesses, or events of historic importance which contributed significantly to the history of the city, state, or nation; or represents a significant portrayal of the cultural practices or the way of life of a definable group of people in a historic time.

a) I don't think anyone can say that these associations were long standing (they seemingly only became important in the last few months) and b) I don't think that "ran a successful business that properly fulfilled the terms of their road paving contracts" should be a consideration for historical recognition. If that is the precedent we may as well stop issuing demo permits for any house in Austin.

I dunno, I was just not impressed.

Unfortunately I also felt like there was a really nasty undercurrent of distrust for anything (and anybody) that hasn't been here for 20 years. Nearly ever speaker in support of the classification said something along the line of "I've been in the neighborhood for XX years". As a relative newcomer to the neighborhood I'm still trying to decide exactly how I feel about that.

Good luck next Monday,
Leon

From: Brian <briantw42@gmail.com>
Subject: mckown house
Date: October 24, 2013 3:24:45 PM CDT
To: lori@lorismythdesign.com

Hello Lori,

My name is Brian Welsh and my wife, daughter and I are residents in Crestview. We've been here for several years and hope to stay many more.

I've come across quite a bit of conversation with regards to the fate of the house at 1501 Richcreek including a post on Reddit from you and I just wanted to lend you my support. I'm not entirely sure how much *true* opposition you have, though I know they are vocal, but I don't believe that you should be prevented from building what you like on that property due to some historical designation. You seem like an entirely reasonable and open person and the very fact that you're as engaged with the community as you say you have been is encouraging enough in my opinion. In the end you're never going to make everyone happy, it's just a shame that some people are resorting to ad hominem or contradictory attacks.

Best of luck at the open forum.

Sincerely,
Brian

> On Oct 24, 2013, at 3:04 PM, Debi <debimajo@gmail.com> wrote:

>

>> You know, I've lived in this hood since 1979... I've moved away and moved back but the WHOLE area has dramatically changed and in a good way. Most of the old timers have moved away. Don't let the few who "whoop and holler" about change affect your plans. They will adjust. And change is so hard for some folks. That house is old and ratty! It needs to go!