

CITY OF AUSTIN

HISTORIC DISTRICT NOMINATION

1. NAME OF DISTRICT: **JUDGES HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

2. **Geographical Description and Boundaries of Judges Hill Historic District**

The 14 square blocks of Austin's original grid encompassed 640 acres and extended from West Avenue on the west to East Avenue (now IH-35) on the east, and from the Colorado River and Water/1st Street north to North/15th Street.

The Judges Hill neighborhood is situated adjacent to the northwest corner of the original grid, an eight-block walk from the Capitol Building. The land rises gently from Congress Avenue to West Avenue with a 24-foot typical rise between Nueces and Rio Grande and a 34-foot rise between Rio Grande and West, where the land plateaus before descending precipitously to Shoal Creek on the western boundary. Originally, each Outlot (those blocks outside the original grid) served as single family homesteads, as indicated on the 1897 Birds Eye map. Thus there were initially no subdivisions; individual property owners divided the various Outlots over time.

The boundaries for the Judges Hill Historic District encompass the core properties of the neighborhood. The boundaries extend from 15th Street on the south to Martin Luther King Boulevard on the north, excepting those properties which are already zoned VMU along MLK Blvd. The eastern boundary includes both the east and west faces of West Avenue. The western boundary is basically the bluff overlooking Shoal Creek (see Boundary Map).

The boundaries do not include Vance Circle, as most of the Vance Circle homes were not built in the period of significance, and because this area does not connect physically to the core of the Judges Hill neighborhood. Nor do the boundaries include any properties west of the bluff overlooking Shoal Creek, for the same reasons.

There are 63 properties within the boundaries; 46 are Contributing and 19 are Non-contributing. Of these, 19 are City of Austin Landmarks (30%), seven are Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (11%), and two are National Register properties (3%).

Square Feet in District: 1,080,848

3. **PROPERTIES WITHIN THE DISTRICT**

TOTAL: 63

CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES: 43

PERCENT OF TOTAL: 68%

NON-CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES: 20

PERCENT OF TOTAL: 32%

What are the main reasons buildings were determined to be non-contributing to the district?

Non-contributing structures were considered as "infill" and did not meet the criteria for the Period of Significance, Architectural Integrity, or Historical Integrity given the three major periods of prominent construction for the Judges Hill area discussed below.

4. **PRINCIPAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND PERIODS OF CONSTRUCTION**

There are at least three periods of activity in the Judges' Hill area. The first phase is that beginning during the Republic and running through World War I, roughly 1840 to 1914. The period from 1870 to 1900 transformed Austin from a backwoods town to a worldly city, thanks to the railroad and the new state university, but the years following the Civil War were politically and economically turbulent. The Victorian era ushered in a more formal regimen of manners and social style, reflected in homes of the time. Interiors were more ornate, and rooms were designed for formal entertainment.

The primal style is reflected in Abner Cook homes and other early buildings. Many elegant, historic homes still line both sides of West Avenue, including the landmark 1870 **Denny-Holliday House** at 1803 West Avenue, and the circa 1855 **Chandler-Shelley House**, also known as **Westhill**, at 1703 West Avenue, a Greek Revival likely built by Cook about the same time he was building the nearby Governor's Mansion. At least eight major homes built before 1914 have been demolished, and one moved, but more than two dozen built by 1914 yet record the grace of the era, and 16 of these are historic landmarks.

The second phase of development includes the period between the two world wars, 1914 to 1940. It continues with the new bungalow style and includes primarily Italianate, Colonial and Classical Revival styles.

Numbers of Houses with the following architectural influences (some houses have more than one style or influence):

3 Queen Anne	3 Tudor Revival
1 Greek Revival	4 Minimal Traditional
5 Neoclassical	1 Monterey
3 Italian Renaissance Revival/ Italianate	1 Prairie
2 Classical Revival	7 Craftsman
13 Colonial Revival	4 Bungalow
1 Edwardian/Classical Revival	3 Modern
1 Spanish Eclectic	3 International
1 Folk Victorian	3 Contemporary

5. PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1850 to 1960

The period of significance dates from 1850, one year prior to the completion of the E.S.C. Robertson and Nathaniel Townsend homes, the first to be built in the neighborhood. Two extant structures in the neighborhood, West Hill and the West Hill Carriage House, date from 1855. Additional 1800s houses still standing include the 1870 Denny-Holliday and 1889 Dignan-Mickey houses.

There was a considerable burst of residential construction between 1900 and WWI, a second residential building phase between 1920 and WWII, and a third residential phase following WWII though the 1950s. The last single-family residence built within the period of significance was constructed in 1960, the contemporary modern Zapalac House at 1604 Pearl. No additional single-family homes were built within the boundaries until the 1990s. One home recently finished construction.

Three duplexes were added between 1948 and 1955. Beginning in 1962 through 1991, construction was exclusively for apartments and condominiums, many of those replacing original residences. One office building was constructed within the boundaries, in 1962, at 1701 West Avenue.

The year 1960 thus marks the transition of the area from exclusively residential – with predominantly single-family homes, a few duplexes and a couple of small apartment houses – to a decade that saw the destruction of numerous historic homes in the area and the conversion of some residences along West Avenue into office space.

6. ARCHITECTURAL COMPOSITION OF THE DISTRICT

A. CONTRIBUTING SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

i. STORIES

How many stories are the contributing houses in the district ?

The contributing houses are primarily one and two stories. Several are 2 ½ stories, with dormers and/or partially or fully finished attics. A few have partial basements.

ii. MATERIALS

a. WALLS

What are the principal exterior wall materials used on contributing houses in the district? Brick, wood, stucco, stone, and combinations of these.

b. ROOF

What are the principal roof materials used on contributing houses in the district?

Shingles (32, asphalt/composition), Metal (10), Flat (3, tar/stone). Originally, some of the homes featured tile roofs.

c. WINDOWS

What are the principal window materials used on contributing houses in the district? Windows are predominantly double-hung, sash style in wood. Two homes have aluminum windows. The Perch has steel windows.

iii. ROOF TYPES

What roof types define the architectural character of contributing houses in the district? Roof types include front and side-gabled (24), hipped (11), flat or gabled/flat (3), and mixed (7).

iv. ADDITIONS

For additions which define the historic and architectural character of the district, describe the height, placement on the house, and whether the materials of the addition match those on the main house.

There are very few additions on contributing houses within the boundaries of the JHHD, and all of those are rear additions. One home has a rear upper story addition; two have two-story rear additions. A few have added porticoes, enclosed porches, or screened porches. All additions are in keeping with the materials of their respective house.

v. PORCHES

Describe the size (full- or partial-width) and materials of front porches on contributing residential buildings in the district, and whether front porches are a significant architectural feature of the houses in the district.

Most houses have porches: 18 partial, 10 full (both one and two-story), 10 independent, 4 wrap-around. Only four houses have no porch. All are wood, a few with cement and/or brick posts/piers. Several feature one or two-story wood columns. Two homes feature ornamental wrought iron porch supports.

vi. CHIMNEYS

Describe the principal materials and placement of chimneys on contributing residential buildings within the district.

Nine of the homes have no chimneys. There are about 15 exterior and 28 internal chimneys. Almost all are brick, with six in stone, one rock, and two stucco.

vii. GARAGE APARTMENTS

Are garage apartments an architectural feature which defines the character of the district? Describe the location on the property, principal exterior materials and roof types of contributing garage apartments.

There are 23 garage apartments and one studio with a loft. A few carriage houses and detached garages have been converted to garage apartments. All are detached and set back to the rear of the main house. Most feature materials and roof types similar to the main houses.

ix. WALLS/FENCES/LANDSCAPE FEATURES

Describe the height, materials, and placement of walls, fences, and other landscape features which define the historical and architectural character of the district.

Most **walls** in the neighborhood are low retaining walls, many very early, from one to three feet in height, primarily stone and cement. Of particular note are two retaining walls originally associated with the E.M. House House. There are few **fences**: a few iron rail fences, three with brick or cement posts; one property has a new six-foot iron rail fence with brick posts.

Almost all of the properties are attractively **landscaped**. A very important feature of the overall landscape is the abundance of **historic trees** that are among the largest in Austin – including numerous huge live oaks, magnolias and pecans. The largest live oaks include two at the Nalle House and two at the McClendon-Kozmetsky House. A group of eleven large heritage/historic trees is located in the vacant lot at the southeast corner of West Avenue and 16th Street, owned by St. Martin's Church. One ginko tree (Sparks House), a gift of a Chinese ambassador, has been pruned back to protect power lines, but its canopy was once quite large. SEE TREE MAP and PHOTOS of street views, landscaping, and trees.

B. MULTI-FAMILY/APARTMENT BUILDINGS

Describe the number of stories and principal exterior materials of apartment buildings which contribute to the historical character of the district.

There are four contributing apartment buildings:

- 803 W. 17 (1924) Converted stable of the E.M. House House, 2 ½ stories, wood
- 1805 Pearl Street (1920) Converted residence, now a student coop. 2 ½ stories, wood
- 1806 Pearl Street (1935) Front duplex with matching rear, detached garage apartments. 2 story, brick. Colonial Revival style with flagstone drive
- 1705 West Avenue (1947) one story duplex (two story rear - on hill, below ground level). Brick with synthetic siding at sides and rear

C CONTRIBUTING COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

There are no non-residential, contributing commercial buildings in the district. No structures were built as offices before 1962. All offices within the district boundaries are in former residential buildings or converted carriage houses/garage apartments.

i. STORIES

How many stories are the contributing commercial buildings in the district (one-story, two-story, more than two stories)?

ii. MATERIALS

a. WALLS

What are the principal exterior wall materials used on contributing commercial buildings in the district?

b. ROOF

What are the principal roof materials used on contributing commercial buildings in the district?

c. WINDOWS

What are the principal window materials used on contributing commercial buildings in the district?

iii. ROOF TYPES

What roof types define the architectural character of contributing commercial buildings in the district (flat, front-gabled, side-gabled, hipped)?

iv. ADDITIONS

For additions which define the historic and architectural character of the district, describe the height, placement on the building, and whether the materials of the addition match those on the main building.

v. SIGNS

- a. What types of signs define the architectural character of contributing commercial buildings in the district (flush-mounted, awning, window, projecting)?

All of the converted offices in the district are in the 1500 and 1600 blocks of West Avenue. Signs are relatively small and discreet. Most are free standing with a couple hanging above entries or flush-mounted. Non-compliant (?)

signage is posted at 1502 West Avenue in the form of a 10 foot by 10 foot free standing sign, 11 feet from the curb. SEE PHOTOS.

- b. What type of lighting is used on signs which define the architectural character of contributing commercial buildings in the district (indirect, back-lit, neon)? Signs in the district are not lit. None of the offices are open in the evenings. Two or three properties have night lighting that can illuminate the front façades of the houses.

D. CONTRIBUTING EDUCATIONAL/INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS: NONE

Describe the location, number of stories, and exterior materials of educational or institutional buildings which contribute to the architectural character of the district. NONE.

E. CONTRIBUTING PARKS/PUBLIC LANDSCAPES: NONE

Describe the location and features of parks and public landscapes in the district which contribute to the architectural character of the district. NONE.

7. ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY

Describe the criteria for assessing the integrity of buildings within the district or how you decided whether each building is contributing or non-contributing. INTEGRITY OF ARCHITECTURE, HISTORICAL INTEGRITY, AND BUILT DURING PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE.

8. BUILDING LOCATIONS AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

Describe the set-backs, location of secondary buildings (garage apartments, detached garages, etc.), driveway types, sidewalk locations, on-street parking configurations, and street lighting which exemplify the district.

Set-backs, measured from the curb, range from a few feet at the 1855 converted Westhill Carriage House, up to 50 feet for the Sparks and McClendon Houses and about 130 feet for the Nalle House. Most properties have generous set-backs of at least 25 feet or more from the curb.

Locations of secondary buildings: all are set back to the rear or completely behind the main house.

Driveways are primarily cement. A few are gravel, aggregate, pavers, asphalt, or flagstone.

Sidewalks are irregular in placement and in need of repair; some are dirt or have stepping stones in segments. SEE SIDEWALK MAP for locations.

On-street parking in residential areas varies: open parking, residents only, restricted to certain times, or no parking. Parking along some sections of West Avenue and on 16th, 17th and 18th Streets between West Avenue and Rio Grande is primarily by paid city meters for varying times of 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or up to three hours.

Street lighting is all standard City of Austin lighting.

9. HISTORIC CONTEXT OF THE DISTRICT

On separate sheets, provide a narrative description of the development and settlement patterns in the district, the names and dates of subdivisions within the district, the cultural, economic, ethnic, and social history of the district, and identify the persons prominent in the development of the district with a bibliography of sources consulted.
SEE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE.

10. ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS

Identify the architects and builders of contributing buildings within the district with a brief biographical sketch, and a list of the buildings attributed to each person identified.
SEE DATA SPREADSHEET for addresses. SEE SURVEYS and HISTORICAL NARRATIVE for biographical information on most architects.

John Allen Greathouse
Charles T. Granger
Hugo Kuehne 3
Henry Bowers Thomson
Page Sutherland Page & Roland G.
Roessner
Abner Cook 2
Dennis Walsh
George Zapalak
Charles H. Page

Roy Thomas 2
Walsh & Giesecke
George Louis Walling
Edwin Kreisle 4
Carlton Brush & Joseph Buffler
A.O. Watson
Henry Loughrey
Page Brothers
H.D. Dear, contractor

NOMINATION PREPARED BY:

Name: Phoebe Allen
Address: 2510 Cedarview Drive, Austin, Texas 78704
Telephone: 512-627-8170
E-mail: phoebezink@gmail.com

APPLICANT

Name: Bob Swaffar
906 West 17th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
Telephone: 512-477-7449
E-mail: swaffar@lostinaustin.com