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October 16, 2015

Ms. Sara Hensley
Director
Parks and Recreation
City of Austin
Via email

Re: Seaholm Intake Facility RFQs

Dear Ms. Hensley,

Preservation Austin would like to thank the Parks & Recreation Department (PARD) for having the vision to seek a public-private partnership to rehabilitate the historic Seaholm Intake Facility, a project that has the potential to adaptively reuse the site, enhance connections to the existing trail system, and allow for citizens to interact with this unique and important site. PARD staff recently presented the two finalist design concepts to our Preservation Committee and based upon that presentation, and review of the RFQS, Preservation Austin would like to share some thoughts on the selection process.

Contrary to some reports, and language in the RFQS, that suggest the property is not on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the Seaholm Intake Facility site was designated on the NRHP in 2013 as part of a historic district that encompasses the Seaholm Power Plant building (see attached documentation). The buildings that comprise the site were designated on the NRHP because they represent outstanding examples of the Art Moderne style applied to concrete industrial/infrastructure buildings, and are integral to understanding the Seaholm Power Plant site across the street. This information is important, not just because it shows the significance of the site, but also because City Code requires building permits on properties located in National Register Districts be reviewed by the Historic Landmark Commission applying the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (SOI Standards). Additionally, the RFQS suggests that the respondents consider use of the federal and state tax credits for rehabilitation of historic properties, which would require review by the Texas Historical Commission and the National Park Service for compliance with the SOI Standards.

Applicable provisions of the SOI Standards call for new uses that require minimal changes to character defining features and avoid removal or destruction of important features and spaces. They also require that changes be undertaken in a manner that is reversible. We understand the challenge of adapting industrial buildings designed for specialized purposes to new uses, but are confident that it can be done in a way that allows for new uses while also maintaining our community's architectural heritage, and the unique architecture of this site. We're concerned that the facts that the site is designated on the NRHP, and that work should comply with the SOI Standards may not be wholly understood by all those participating in the RFQS process.

In addition to the SOI Standards, the Project Goals state, "The Respondent's final proposal should incorporate the design sensibility of the overall space while keeping the historic façade," which further supports the importance of not materially altering the façade, nor removing large portions of the

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building(s). We ask that the City take this into account when selecting a finalist and that compliance with the SOI Standards be included in any contract with a development team.

We understand that the project has other goals besides preserving the historic character of the buildings, including trail connectivity, providing recreational and cultural amenities, incorporating sustainable design elements, and responding to the neighborhood. However, a design intent that does not carefully and sensitively address the significance of the buildings' architectural character and permanently alters this unique and significant architectural resource fails to, "merge historical significance with cultural, recreational, and civic opportunities," as stated in the preface to Seaholm Intake Facility Request for Qualifications Statements (RFQs) and Redevelopment Concept, October 30, 2014.

Given the site's designation on the NRHP, and it being the largest and most visible project currently being proposed for a City-owned historic building, we feel it would be appropriate for the finalists' design concepts to be presented to the Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) for comment prior to being taken to City Council. This could be accomplished at the next meeting of the HLC on October 26, 2015.

We request that the Parks Board and City Council take into account the significance of this very important historic site, and its current designation on the NRHP, when reviewing and selecting a team for this project. That selection process should take into account the team's experience with designing historic sites and public spaces, their ability to address all the goals of the project, and their ability to sensitively address the historic architectural character of the buildings.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alyson McGee
President

Cc:

City Council members
HLC Chair Mary Jo Galindo
Parks & Recreation Board
Marty Stump
Lyn Estabrook
Steve Sadoswky
Beth Johnson