Citizens Concerned for Holly
- unincorporated, unaffiliated and unbought -
2101 Jesse Segovia
Austin, TX 78702

May 23, 2016
Planning Commissioners, City of Austin
301 W. 2nd Street
Austin, TX 78701

Re: **RBJ Mixed Use Redevelopment**
C20-2015-019-Festival Beach Waterfront Overlay Subdistrict

Dear Chair Oliver & Commissioners:

We are an independent group of longtime Holly residents concerned about the impact of this development on our homes, our community, and our waterfront. Like everything in this town, the proposal is being rushed thru without notice to the public and in a somewhat shifty manner based on deals that none of us were privy to.

Most mixed-use projects that add so much density to surrounding neighborhoods involve at least some community benefits. Because this is being rammed thru as a "code amendment," though, there's no process for evaluating the match between impact & benefit. We question this entire approach, since the whole thing is designed to benefit one developer and looks basically like a PUD. (Which, according to Neighborhood Housing, the developer wanted to avoid applying for).

We've lived here long before downtown developers came, and many of us have friends and family living in the RBJ building. We know that it needs repairs and strongly support efforts towards that end. But this is not the kind of "affordable housing" that the building's namesake, Rebekah Baines Johnson, envisioned.

LBJ's legacy is rooted in the tradition of true public housing that exists solely for the benefit of disadvantaged residents and the benefits that accrue to everyone from their presence in the community. This deal, like so many others, is mainly about developer profits and would invariably cause housing prices to increase as a result of all the "market rate" residential and "retail" that is the

true driver of the project. Why not explore partnering with a traditional public housing non-profit, rather than making this into just another high-end mixed use development that's out of step with the surrounding neighborhood? This property, because of its deep community history and proximity to public lands, is uniquely suited towards reaffirming the value of true public housing.

Again, from talking to Neighborhood Housing, it doesn't sound like that was ever looked at. The whole thing was engineered from the start by developers, with the desired outcome preordained. According to the Parks department, they even tried to convince staff that they had a right to use City parkland(!) and thus avoid the need for any further Commission or Council approval.

Last, but not least, the Commission should realize that this amendment would spell the beginning of the end for the Waterfront Overlay. Unless you stand firm, there are sure to be more "code amendments" of this sort seeking to undo longstanding protections that have made Lady Bird Lake a treasured place for the whole community, rather than a backyard for the privileged.

In closing, it must be said that none of the prior Council resolutions regarding RBJ require amending the Waterfront Overlay or otherwise providing for high-end mixed use that would add so much density to the local street system, drive housing prices up, and undermine lakefront planning goals. We ask the Commission to look behind the developer's assertions and stand firm against this proposal.

Kindest regards,

Citizens Concerned for Holly

cc SaveTownLake
PODER