

# King's herb garden



Photo by Barbara Watt

The restored four-plex at 1618 Palma Plaza dates to the 1930s.

## Special fourplex

While most news stories about a construction in the West Austin area focus on what *has* been built, Ed Berlage is pleased about what he did not build — namely another condominium.

When the more-than-50-year-old fourplex at 1618 Palma Plaza, owned by Berlage, fell into disrepair, Berlage gutted it, leaving only the outer walls of the original structure. He rebuilt the four one-bedroomn apartments, adding

decks on the back of each to overlook the newly landscaped green space left in the rear of the building.

"There's not too much incentive to do this nowadays, Berlage said. A few years ago, condominiums were being built everywhere." Berlage said he feels that the fourplex is more desirable for the neighborhood.

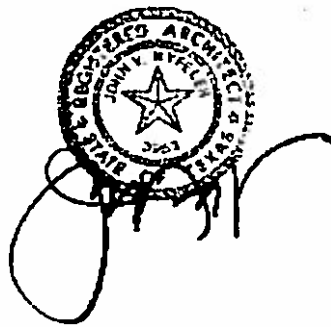
The Old West Austin Neighborhood Association tends to agree with him. "He did do an excellent job," said Kathy Davis, co-chairman of the steering committee of that neighborhood organization. "He cared a great deal about how the structure would fit into the neighborhood," she said.

Berlage is no stranger to striving for better quality in neighborhood construction. He lives in the Bry-

kerwoods area and serves on the board of Bryker Woods Neighborhood Association.

**EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS  
OF  
1618 PALMA PLAZA, AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**Prepared for FourT Realty  
1601 Rio Grande Street, Suite 333  
Austin, Texas 78701**



**By  
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**October 21, 2016**

John Nyfeler, FAIA

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Consulting Architect

October 24, 2016

Mr. Tom Terkel  
FourT Realty  
1601 Rio Grande Street, Suite 333  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: 1618 Palma Plaza Property, Austin

Dear Mr. Terkel:

As we agreed, I am sending you my report on my architectural evaluation of the referenced property against the criteria set out in the City of Austin Land Development Code, Articles 25-2-352, for historic (H) zoning.

I am prepared to discuss my report and its conclusions with you at a time convenient to you.

Very truly yours,



John V. Nyfeler, FAIA

Encl.

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1618 PALMA PLAZA, AUSTIN**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>i. Transmittal letter</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ii. Table of Contents</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>I. BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>III. PURPOSE</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>IV. MEANS AND METHODS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>V. CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>VI. DISCUSSION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A. Degree of Integrity</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>B. Architectural Style</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>C. Building Type</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>D. Contributing Building</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>E. Summary</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>VII. EXHIBITS</b>	<b>13</b>

# **EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF 1618 PALMA PLAZA, AUSTIN**

## **I. BACKGROUND**

City of Austin has created a means by which real properties may be evaluated and may be given historic landmark zoning designation (H). Those means are set out in Article 25-2-352 of the Land Development Code by the listing of the criteria that, if met by the property, will allow the Council to apply such landmark zoning designation.

The purpose of the Land Development Code is to set out clear, objective, understandable, measurable and reliable criteria that can be used by the city administration, and by the public to make decisions with confidence about real property.

The purpose of Article 25-2-352 HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA, is to present in detail, the objective criteria used by the Council to determine if a property may or may not be designated historic. These criteria, among other things include evaluation of a property based on its integrity, architectural stylistic influences, building type and contribution to the surrounding neighborhood.

In the administration of the Land Development Code, the Council has created the Historic Landmark Commission to advise the Council on whether, in the Commission's opinion, based on the criteria established in Section 25-2-352, a property does or does not meet the stated and required criteria.

There is great value to the community in the preservation of historic structures and the purpose of Article 25-2-352 is to support that value.

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

Based on its belief that the property at 1618 Palma Plaza does not meet the historic zoning criteria, and in anticipation of a redevelopment of the property to its highest and best use, FourT Realty has filed an application for a demolition permit for the property located at 1618 Palma Plaza. Prior to a demolition permit being issued by the City of Austin, a determination must be made by the Council that the property is not a historic structure and not zoned (H) historic.

In this matter, in response to the application by FourT Realty for a demolition permit, City Staff of the Preservation Office, Planning and Development, has itself filed an application for Historic Zoning to be applied to the property. If granted by the Council, Historic Landmark (H) zoning for the property would preclude demolition of the existing building. If not granted, the processing of the application for demolition permit may proceed.

### **III. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to state an architect's opinion, based on available data and research whether the property at 1618 Palma Plaza in Austin meets or fails to meet the architectural historic designation criteria laid out in the Land Development Code.

### **IV. MEANS AND METHODS**

The means and methods used in arriving at an architect's opinion as to whether the property at 1618 Palma Plaza meets the stated architectural historic designation criteria include:

- A. The review of available documents as listed in Exhibit A.
- B. Site visit and building examination.
- C. Application of the requirements of Land Development Code 25-2-352 HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA.
- D. Review of Stylistic Influences variously claimed by the historic surveyors of record as being Tudor Revival and/or Spanish Colonial Revival.
- E. Consideration of my experience as a practicing architect in Texas since 1970.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

The property at 1618 Palma Plaza, Austin fails to meet the architectural elements set out in the Historic Zoning Criteria set out in the Land Development Code.

## **VI. DISCUSSION**

The foregoing conclusion has been reached by an evaluation of the existing building's history and appearance against the architectural elements in the HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA set out in 25-2-352. This discussion section sets out the reasons for the Conclusion.

From an architectural evaluation, the property fails to meet the historic designation criteria in four ways:

- \* failure to maintain a high degree of integrity
- \* failure to embody a distinguishing architectural style
- \* failure to retain the unique characteristics of a building type
- \* failure to contribute to its neighborhood

### **A. The property fails to retain a high degree of integrity.**

1. *"For a property to retain its integrity, it must retain most of its features and not include ... alterations that significantly compromise its integrity."*  
[25-2-352 (A)(2)]

Further, The National Register Bulletin, Part VII HOW TO EVALUATE THE INTEGRITY OF A PROPERTY, CRITERION C, states:

*"...if it retains the essential physical features that make up its character or appearance..." and "...for illustrating a particular architectural style or construction technique (it) must retain most of the physical features that constitute that style"*

In my opinion the property does not retain its integrity as it has experienced a number of significant alterations over its life and therefore not retained its original essential physical features.

2. For example, the original pitched roof seen in aerial photographs has been replaced with a flat roof. (See Exhibits 17, 18 and 19)

3. The building exterior has been completely concealed by an Exterior Insulation and Finish System (EIFS) faux stucco layer completely obscuring the original exterior surface. (See Exhibits 16 a, b and c)

4. By examination, the existing double hung windows are not of the original construction.

5. By examination of the aerial photographs of different dates, an original front porch has been replaced by a different and larger porch with clay tile roof shingles, false, sheet metal "Doric" straight-sided columns. (See Exhibits 17 and 18)

6. Tile ornament appliqué is imbedded in the EIFS finish coat in no style pattern. Some of the tile appliqué has fallen away. (See Exhibit 16 d)

**B. The property fails to embody the distinguishing characteristics of a recognized architectural style.**





Southeast Elevation (facing Palma Plaza), Winter view without tree vegetation, showing 1980's porch addition with clay tile detail and "Doric" columns, exterior EIFS skin and replaced windows.

1. A property may be seen to illustrate a particular architectural style if...

*"...the property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of a recognized architectural style..."*

[25-3-352(A)(a)]

The building's Stylistic Influences have been variously classified by different historic surveyors both as Tudor Revival and as Spanish Colonial Revival. It cannot be both.

2. The survey reports of surveyors as recorded in the Historical Site Survey Forms disagree as to the style of the building.

Sharon Fleming, AIA, now Director, Architecture Division, Texas Historical Commission opined on 2.11.2001 that the building is of Tudor Revival style. (See Exhibit 9)

A similar survey form dated 9.5.2005 whose author is not identified, lists the building as Spanish Colonial. (See Exhibit 11)

Volunteer surveyors on 11.26.2001 listed the building as Spanish Colonial. (See Exhibit 12)

Sharon Fleming and Marie Vander Weele on 3.11.2001 list the building as Tudor Revival. (See Exhibit 13)

3. Ralph Newlan, Architectural Historian and Principal of Cox/McLain Environmental Consulting, Inc. on 6.22.2001 fails to make a style opinion in his survey report. (See Exhibit 14)

4. Based on the absence of essential architectural attributes of either Tudor Revival or Spanish Colonial Revival Stylistic Influences the building at 1618 Palma Plaza has no discernable architectural style.

5. The Tudor Revival primary architectural style include elements such as:

- a. Steep pitched roofs
- b. Half timbering
- c. Herringbone brickwork
- d. Tall multicolored windows
- e. High chimneys
- f. Overhanging second floor
- g. Dormers and windows
- h. Double hung windows less common

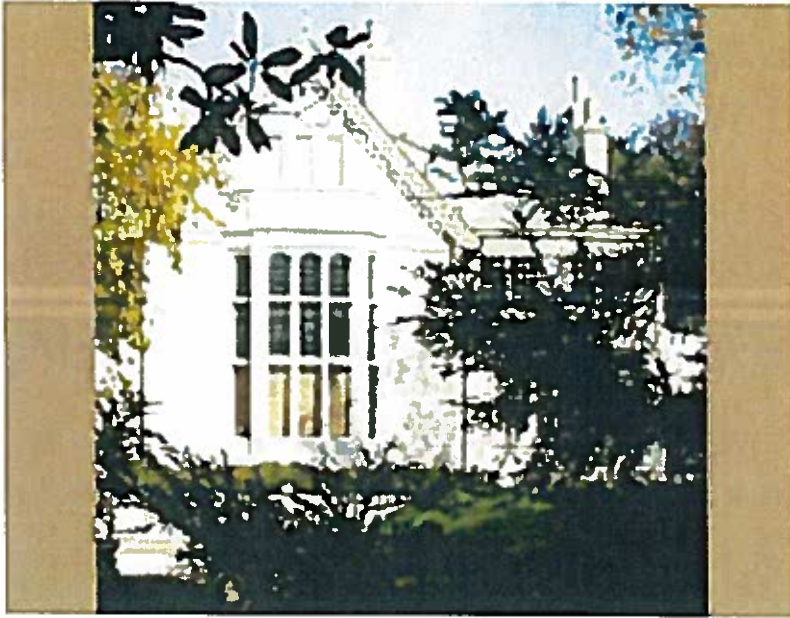
The building fails to "...embody the distinguishing characteristics of..." Tudor Revival Style architecture.

The following images of buildings illustrate Tudor Revival Style architecture.









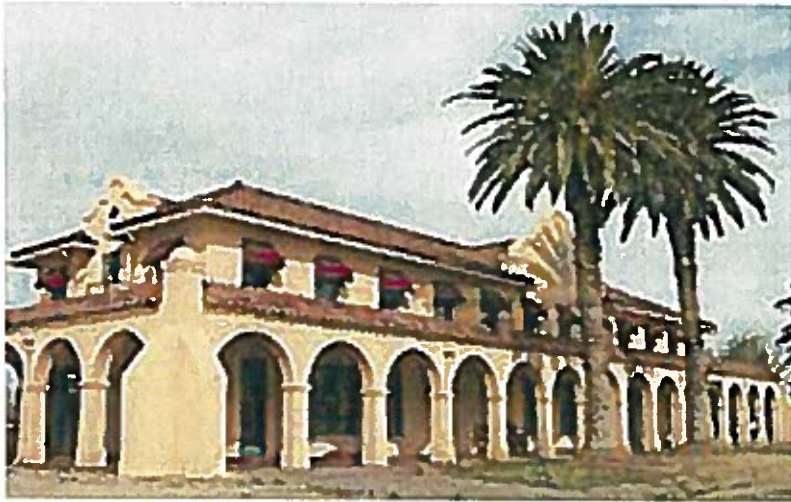
6. The Spanish Colonial Revival primary architectural style includes elements such as:

- a. Arches.
- b. Curved steps
- .c. White heavy textured stucco exterior
- d. Painted tiles
- e. Terracotta roof tiles
- f. Tower-like chimneys
- g. Decorative ledges
- h. Balconies
- i. Ornamental iron work
- j. Wooden doors
- k. Courtyards and patios

While the building has an off-white finely textured EIFS exterior coating added in the 1980's, and a very small amount of clay tile added with the new porch, the building fails to "*...embody the distinguishing characteristics of ...*" Spanish Colonial Revival style.

The following images of buildings illustrate Spanish Colonial Revival Style.





7. The several surveyors preparing the Historical Site Form, Residential Property, did not agree as to the building's recognized architectural style, then the building clearly does not embody "... *the distinguishing characteristics of a recognized architectural style.*" The building thus fails to meet this architectural style ordinance requirement.

8. The existing property includes a front porch added in the 1980's after demolition of the original porch. The new front porch added a few clay tile roof shingles on the roof over an arched portal entrance. The addition incorporated a pair of sheet metal "Doric" straight-sided columns. This applied front porch element replacing the original does not constitute the distinguishing characteristics of a Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style.



**C. The property fails to retain the distinguishing characteristics of a building type.**

1. For a property to retain the distinguishing characteristics of a building type, *"The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of a recognized architectural...type..."*. [25-2-352(A)(3)(b)(1)]

2. Staff has asserted in its application for historic zoning that:

*"This building is a very rare type in Austin -- there are few four-plexes of this era remaining..."*

3. There is nothing in the architectural appearance of the building that clearly identifies the building as a four-plex. From the exterior, the building might be a duplex, tri-plex or a single-family dwelling.

4. Moreover, even if the building were zoned historic, there is nothing to prevent an owner from converting the interior of the building from a four-plex to any use permitted in MF-3 zoning including a single family dwelling comparable to those dwellings in the neighborhood.

4. To form the basis for historic zoning designation (H) the buildings' architecture or other feature of type permanently inherent to the building must be present. There is no such permanent feature or architectural style inherent in 1618 Palma Plaza.

**D. The property fails to have a unique physical characteristic or significant feature that makes it a contributor to a Historic Area Combining District or Historic Landmark Combining District.**

1. *"The Council may designate a structure... as a historic landmark (H) if...the property...has...physical characteristics...that contribute to the character, image or cultural identity of a neighborhood..."* [(25-2-352) (A) (3) (b) (iv)]

2. The surveyors using the HISTORIC SITE FORM, RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY of the Austin History Center, over time classified the property sometimes as contributing and sometimes as non-contributing.

3. The 2.11.2001 survey by Sharon Fleming, AIA and Marie Vander Weele classified the building as non-contributing. (See Exhibit 9)



4. The 3.11.2001 surveyed by Sharon Fleming, AIA and Marie Vander Weele classified the building as contributing. (See Exhibit 13)

5. The survey of 6.22.2001 (surveyor not identified) classified the building as contributing. (See Exhibit 14)

6. The 11.26.2001 survey by Ralph Newlan classified the building as non-contributing. (See Exhibit 11)

7. The 9.05.2005 survey by volunteers classified the building as non-contributing. (See Exhibit 11)

This disagreement or confusion does not result in a clear consensus by the surveyors. Further and more authoritative, the City of Austin report of PROPERTIES LOCATED IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS, 4/2/2012, P. 65 of 88, lists 1618 Palma Plaza as Non-Contributing Status. (See Exhibit 23)

In my opinion the property has no distinguishing appearance that makes a unique contribution to the Old West Austin Neighborhood.

#### **E. Summary**

**In summary, therefore, by reference to the language of the HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA set out in 25-2-352, the property fails to meet the threshold criteria required for historic (H) zoning because it does not retain a high degree of integrity that clearly conveys its historical significance, does not embody a distinguishing architectural style, does not retain the characteristics of an architectural building type and does not contribute to a neighborhood or district.**

### **VII. EXHIBITS**

#### **A. Documents reviewed.**

1. Staff Recommendation for case NRD-2016-0061 for August 22, 2016 meeting of the Historic Landmark Commission

2. Staff Recommendation for case NRD-2016-0061 for September 26, 2016 meeting of the Historic Landmark Commission.

3. Location Map (aerial photograph) marked C5-2
4. Selected photographs marked C5-3 and C5-4. 13
5. Occupancy History of 1618 Palma Plaza
6. Building Permits
  - a. May 6, 1953 building permit for addition of a 4-space carport
  - b. August 15, 1972, building permit for repairs.
  - c. 1979 demolition permit to remove carport structure.
7. National Register Bulletin, Part VIII, How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property.
8. 25-2-352 HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA.
9. Historical Site Form dated 2.11.2001, Fleming and Vande Welle (sic)
10. Map fragment showing site.
11. Historical Site Form dated 9.5.05
12. Historical Site Form dated 11.26.01
13. Historical Site Form dated 3.11.01 by Fleming and Vander Weele (sic)
14. Historical Site Form dated 6.22.01 by Ralph Nowlan
15. Austin American Statesman article of 6.27.85 p. 9
16. Selected photos of exterior of building
  - a. Elevation (B&W) (Winter)
  - b. Porch elevation (color)
  - c. Elevation color (summer)
  - d. Fragment of Front Elevation (showing tile missing)

17. Aerial Photo, 1968 City of Austin Records
18. Aerial Photo, 1984 City of Austin Records
19. Aerial Photo, 1973, Public Records
20. Aerial Photo, 1985 Public Records
21. Review of National Register Bulletin 22, National Parks Service (1996)
22. National Registry Bulletin, Part VI, HOW TO IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF SIGNIFICANCE OF A PROPERTY.
23. City of Austin, PROPERTIES LOCATED IN NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS, 4/2/2012, (p.65 of 88), 1618 Palma Plaza listed as Non-Contributing.
24. NPS Form 10-900-a (8-86), United States Department of Interior, National Parks Service NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEETS, Old West Austin Historic District, p. 7 of 15, showing buildings in address numbered sequence in which 1618 Palma Plaza is not included.

-end of report-