

To: the City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission

From: Enid Woodward and Danny Fowler, Ebony Acres Homeowners

Re: Houses threatened with demolition and the false claim of “end of useable life”

Attached you will find a letter from Stanford Consulting regarding houses in the Ebony Acres neighborhood.

We requested and are submitting this letter in rebuttal to the assertion made by the property owner of 1190 E. M. Franklin, 3601 and 3607 Grant St. that those houses were “at the end of their useable life” and are therefore candidates for demolition. The applicant made this statement in oral testimony before the commission at the November 2016 hearing.

We would vigorously dispute that claim especially as these houses have all been used as rental properties during the current year and two of them are currently occupied.

We offer the example of our own homes, of the same construction and approximate age, to show that with proper care and some rehabilitation all these houses have the potential to continue as suitable housing.

Another house on our street of the same vintage and configuration located at 3602 Grant recently sold to a young couple. It was on the market for one day and the asking price was \$299, 000. You can see the property on Zillow. This is also proof that these houses have much life left in them, given the proper care and treatment.

For the owner to claim that these houses have reached the end of their ‘useable life’ and should be destroyed is kind of like the guy who murdered his parents and then asked for mercy from the court because he was an orphan. If the houses threatened with demolition look somewhat derelict in appearance, it is only because of the actions of the current owner.

We would ask you to consider the opinion of Mr. Stanford in evaluating the claim of end of useable life for these three homes threatened with demolition in our neighborhood.

We would further ask that the application for permits for demolition for 1190 E. M. Franklin, 3601 and 3607 Grant St. be denied.

These houses can and should be saved to maintain the important historical legacy of the Ebony Acres neighborhood.

Respectfully,

Enid Woodward, 1194 E. M. Franklin Avenue

Danny Fowler, 1192 E. M. Franklin Avenue

Attached: Ebony Acres Opinion, Mark Stanford

December 13th, 2016

To the Austin Historic Zoning Commission and other interested parties:

My name is Mark Stanford; I have lived and worked in Austin for more than 35 years. My professional experience involves over 50 years of residential construction, including 30 of those years as a testifying expert in forensic analysis of construction defects and standard of care for the residential and commercial construction industry. My company has investigated hundreds of residences/commercial buildings and tested thousands of construction components in those 30 years of forensic work. I have been asked to provide my opinion on the possible “useable life of houses” in the Ebony Acres subdivision of Austin, Texas.

Based on my knowledge and experience in the Ebony Acres neighborhood, specifically the complete remodel of the property at 1194 E M Franklin Avenue, I am able to offer the following comments, opinions, and conclusions. In 2010, the current owner of the home at 1194 E M Franklin Avenue, Ms. Enid Woodward, contracted with my company, Stanford Construction, to modernize and update her existing home with an eye toward upgrading the structure to current building and energy code standards. The home was purchased by Ms. Woodward in 2006 from the original and sole owner, Mrs. Doris White. The home was originally built in 1954 in the area known as Ebony Acres.

I also have hands-on knowledge of the property owned by Mr. Danny Fowler and located at 1192 E M Franklin which was built in 1954 as well. I inspected Mr. Fowler’s home in 2010, in response to his inquiry concerning remodel of his property in 2010 as well and after seeing the work my company was doing on Ms. Woodward’s house. My own home in Austin was also originally built in 1954 and which I have owned since 1991.

Ms. Woodward’s house and Mr. Fowler’s as well are of similar age, design, and construction to many other houses in the subdivision including those at 1190 E M Franklin, 1192 E M Franklin, 3601 Grant Street, and 3607 Grant Street. I believe all of the houses were built by the well-known and respected builder, Mr. Clarence Flournoy, who also provided financing for the original purchasers/owners. I understand 1190 E M Franklin and 3601 and 3607 Grant Street are currently under threat of demolition and the owners of these specific houses have claimed that the structures have reached the end of their “useable life”. In contrast, I also understand the houses continue to have “useable life” as they have been occupied as late as this year by renters.

Based upon my hands-on experience with the remodel of Ms. Woodward’s house at 1194 E M Franklin, my inspection of Mr. Fowler’s house located at 1192 E M Franklin, my education, experience, and training, my professional opinion is the useable life of houses of this type construction (and specifically in this locale) can be relatively easily extended at moderate expense. The original construction of the homes of this type of pier and beam construction makes them all readily amenable to rehabilitation and remodeling.

The very traditional pier and beam method of construction allows the owner/remodeler to gain access both above (from the open attic) and below the living areas (from the readily accessible crawlspace) easily to enact plumbing, electrical, foundation, flooring, mechanical, carpentry, and other types of repairs required. In addition, the pier and beam model is very well suited for use on the rocky, clay hillside soil upon which this neighborhood is built. In my professional opinion, the pine and oak lumber installed in the original construction actually outperforms the newer wood used in current construction projects. I also believe the mid-century craftsmanship of the construction actually surpasses in many ways the current building methods used in house construction.

These homes are based upon a simple plan/format, easily maintained and readily recognizable as authentic representatives of a particular style of construction meant to provide an efficient system for individuals and small families to have a safe habitat for the occupants and their children/relatives. These small homes are also important in their providing the blue-collar building blocks of the neighborhood, the common cornerstones of the streets and avenues of East Austin. The 2 bedrooms, 1 bath home of this style with less than a thousand square foot home was and still remains an affordable, stable workhorse of housing which continues to provide comfort and protection from the elements.

It is my expert opinion that as a general rule, houses of this era and this construction are not necessarily at the end of their ‘useable life’ as stated by the applicant for demolition, but rather are ready for a renewal/extension of their life, capable of serving as affordable housing for another generation of Austinites. I am happy to inspect the properties scheduled for demolition for a specific opinion of the three houses, if allowed.

The homes currently threatened with demolition are actually newer than the home we remodeled at 1194 E M Franklin. According to my information, 1190 E M Franklin was built in 1957 and 3601 Grant/3607 Grant were both built in 1961.

These minimalist Texas bungalows of pier and beam construction, like the 60 plus year old home owned by Ms. Woodward and remodeled in 2010 by my construction company, provide a very real opportunity for any owner to take advantage of the original construction qualities and benefits. These represent the efficient models of a planned community which has well served the community of East Austin and certainly could thus continue to provide affordable housing, existing in harmony with the surrounding physical environment and compatible with the social setting of single family homes on standard city lots.

If you drive the neighborhood streets of Austin and certainly, Ebony Acres itself, you will see examples of the sturdy nature of these small homes which formed the core of a community, important in the past and certainly important now. These are indeed becoming rarer to find, often tucked away in neighborhoods as hidden, historical gems in contrast to the fate of the vast majority which have been bulldozed to make way for larger and grander structures.

Most assuredly, these mid-century, single family homes are survivors when they are allowed to remain. In my opinion, they should be given an opportunity to still stand and present a living, ongoing example of an important style and type of construction very representative of the East Austin neighborhoods, historically and currently. These homes represent how a cooperative community bonded and banded together to create a living and working environment, an environment which still continues to foster the diversity found throughout Austin. Austin’s population obviously needs more of these capable, stable, and still viable homes, not less.

This minimalist Texas bungalow style of housing as represented by the homes in the Ebony Acres neighborhood has served homeowners very well in many parts of Austin and beyond. With proper care and modification at a modicum of expense, these houses (and this type of dwelling) could well be expected to continue their lives as comfortable homes for Austin families for many years and decades to come.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Stanford". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Respectfully submitted,".

Mark Stanford, Owner
Stanford Consulting and Stanford Construction