

December 16, 2016

Re: 2506 Great Oaks Parkway

Historic Landmarks Commission
City of Austin
Austin Historic Preservation Office
Planning and Development Review Department
P.O. Box 1088, Austin, Texas 78767

Dear Historic Landmarks Commissioners:

In your recent hearing on November 21, 2016, you postponed a decision on the demolition permit request for 2506 Great Oaks Parkway to allow time for additional research. I have conducted research myself to insure comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of the property's eligibility for historic zoning. My analysis of research materials regarding 2506 Great Oaks clearly indicates that the property meets multiple criteria for landmark designation and retains its integrity. Furthermore, preservation of the property is in accord with a broad array of the City's stated goals. Currently, initiation of historic zoning is the *only* mechanism for insuring preservation within Austin's Code of Ordinances. The property's landmark eligibility, along with the benefits of historic zoning for this property, are detailed below.

LANDMARK ELIGIBILITY

- **CRITERIA:** 2506 Great Oaks meets the defined City of Austin Historic Landmark Criteria for Architecture and Historical Associations.
 - **Architecture:** The house at 2506 Great Oaks is an exceptional example of the emerging influences of midcentury Contemporary architecture on the Ranch Style in the early 1950s. Based on Virginia McAlester's 2013 edition of *A Field Guide to American Houses*, the property was designed with character-defining features of both the Ranch and Contemporary Styles, as listed below. (Photos of character-defining features available at https://dmoore.egnyte.com/fl/mZOm3HnFkd/Photos_.)
 - Ranch Style: "Broad one-story shape, usually built low to ground; low-pitched roof without dormers; commonly with moderate-to-wide roof overhang, front entry usually located off-center and sheltered under main roof of house...a large picture window generally present; asymmetrical façade" (McAlester, 597). Other character-defining features of the Ranch Style present at 2506 Great Oaks include casement windows, wrought-iron porch posts with simple concave diamond-shape detail, and integrated brick planters at the front porch. A noteworthy exception to the typical Ranch Style at 2506 Great Oaks is that the garage is not attached to the main façade of the house – a function of the custom design and attention to detail expressed in this house.
 - Contemporary Style: "Low-pitched gabled roof...with widely overhanging eaves...windows generally present in gable ends...built with natural materials (wood, stone, brick, or occasionally concrete block); ...asymmetrical" (McAlester, 629). At 2506 Great Oaks, the unique wing-like gable ends and clerestory windows under the gables are telltale hallmarks of the Contemporary Style. McAlester includes an example of similar outward-slanting gable ends on Frank Lloyd Wright's Niels House in Minneapolis in 1951 – immediately prior to the design of this house (639). Other contemporary details include and a horizontal emphasis expressed by the broad chimney and narrow bricks in a running bond pattern, as well as the light well in the porch roof, designed to

highlight the recessed planter beds and corbelled brick planters on the chimney. This continuation of vegetation onto the porch was part of the melding of indoor and outdoor spaces that was key to the philosophy of Contemporary architecture.

○ **Historical Associations:**

▪ Individuals

- Andrew S. Patton: The builder of 2506 Great Oaks—Andrew S. Patton—was a significant builder of custom midcentury homes and commercial buildings in north-central Austin, as well as downtown. Patton was an influential member of the Austin Association of Homebuilders in the 1950s and 1960s and chaired the committee that organized the Association’s popular Parade of Homes—working together with well-known architect A.D. Stenger. Background information documenting Patton’s significance, as well as a selection of his known works in Austin, is available at <https://dmoore.egnyte.com/fl/B6lvdcZODJ/Patton>.
- Douglas W. Sandberg: Architect Douglas Sandberg is significant as the designer of Patton’s many midcentury works in Austin. While Patton presented the public face of the team, Sandberg quietly worked with him on his projects, and the two shared an office in Patton’s house. Sandberg additionally operated the Douglas W. Sandberg Lumber Company on Manor Road, giving him unique access to the supplies used to construct his designs. Background material regarding Sandberg is available at <https://dmoore.egnyte.com/fl/WwJJ4bljBr/Sandberg>.
- Mr. and Mrs. E. Wayne Hall. From 1958 until 2004, the property was owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. E. Wayne Hall and their family. E. Wayne Hall worked for Associated General Contractors from 1958 through 1988 and was active and influential member of the Democratic Party in Austin. Together, Mr. Hall and his wife, Mary Root Hall, served as co-presidents of the Rosedale Elementary Parent-Teacher-Association for many years. Mary R. Hall also an active promoter of arts and education in Austin. Documentation of the significance of Mr. and Mrs. E. Wayne Hall is available at <https://dmoore.egnyte.com/fl/wQmAXM8cLV/Hall>. The Hall family stood at the center of community life in the Rosedale neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s, and giving their home community value at the local level.

▪ Trends

- The property is a rare, early example representing the trend of vertical integration of the custom homebuilding process. Andrew S. Patton and Douglas Sandberg were involved in all stages of the home development process – from subdividing the land to designing the house to building the house. According to Patton’s daughter Andrea (“Tinka”) Patton, they employed craftsmen themselves rather than contracting the work out. Douglas Sandberg also owned a lumberyard (as documented in the research materials regarding Sandberg above), which allowed the partners to source the construction materials themselves. As described in the National Park Service’s *Historic Residential Suburbs* bulletin (<https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/index.htm>), the consolidation of the process of subdividing land, designing homes, building them, and selling them was an important nationwide trend after World War II. However, this trend typically was on a large scale, with a high degree of standardization. Applying the systematic management of all aspects of the

building process to a small, custom homebuilding enterprise is highly unusual and important for understanding the evolution of the construction business as it operates today.

- The trend of small-scale, custom-designed subdivisions of midcentury houses is established as significant in the Citywide Historic Context of Austin (volume II, section 1.5). Using the Citywide Context as the framework for evaluating historic significance is the most reliable way to ensure consistency and predictability in evaluations of the significance of historical associations. As noted in the Executive Summary, the Citywide Context cannot spell out the specifics of every significant historical trend, but it does provide a framework where newfound significance can be inserted and analyzed. For example, the Citywide Context discusses Stenger but not Patton, but this newfound information about Patton easily can fit within the framework under which Stenger is discussed -- the trend of small-scale, custom-designed subdivisions within mid-century Austin.
- The significance of north Austin—especially the area along Shoal Creek Boulevard—in the development of midcentury Austin. As the Citywide Context discusses, this area was the nexus of development in postwar Austin (volume II, section 1.5). Maps within the Citywide Context clearly depict the concentration of growth along the Shoal Creek corridor in the 1950s (see figure II-82). Yet, to date, it appears that there are no designated historic landmarks from the 1950s along the Shoal Creek corridor north of West 24th Street. A City’s collection of historic landmark nominations should accurately reflect the breadth and significance of the City’s history. The postwar period was arguably the most important period in Austin’s urban development, and the Shoal Creek area was arguably importantly the most neighborhood during that period. The lack of *any* designated historic resources that tell that story represents a significant gap. Designating 2506 Great Oaks as a historic landmark would be tie many significant contextual threads into the City’s collection of landmark nominations.
- **INTEGRITY:** The physical integrity of the house and landscape remain overwhelmingly intact. The only exterior alterations visible from the public right-of-way are the replacement of the original windows and removal of original porch posts. The original metal casement windows have been replaced compatibly with new casement windows of appropriate dimension, without altering the original fenestration pattern. The house today lacks its original porch posts with their simple, contemporary concave diamond-shape pattern, although Google Street View shows that these were extant as late as October 2014. The porch posts can be restored easily, and often may be found in storage in the garage or elsewhere on the property. Otherwise, all character-defining features of the house remain intact, so that the house continues to clearly communicate the influences of the Ranch and Contemporary architectural styles, consistent with the original design intent of Patton and Sandberg.

BENEFITS OF HISTORIC ZONING

The charge of the Landmarks Commission is simple to evaluate eligibility for landmark status and, if a property meets these criteria, to initiate historic zoning. Because the property so clearly meets the criteria, as demonstrated above, I urge you to initiate historic zoning for 2506 Great Oaks.

While outside the purview of the Landmarks Commission, the Commission also should feel confident the preservation of 2506 Great Oaks also meets stated goals of the *Imagine Austin* comprehensive plan and will enhance the economic, environmental, and community interests of the City in the following ways:

- Preserving our neighborhood character. *Imagine Austin* explicitly endorses preservation, with the stated goal of “Maintaining historic neighborhood character and preserving historic resources — especially in the urban core — as the city continues to grow” (117).
- Enhancing our job market. Preservation produces more local jobs because it focuses construction dollars on labor rather than new materials, which are largely manufactured outside of Austin and often outside of the United States. The Texas Historical Commission’s 2015 study, *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas*, clearly substantiates the job-creation benefits of preservation. The study notes that, in 2013, preservation supported more than 79,000 jobs in Texas (<http://www.thc.texas.gov/news-events/economic-impact-historic-preservation-texas>).
- Maintaining our heritage tourism appeal. The *Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Texas* documents that, in 2013, tourists spent \$2.26 billion on the portions of their trips that were *directly* related to heritage-tourism activities.
- Preserving the embodied energy within the historic home. The building that is preserved is always the greenest home. The National Trust recently published a comprehensive report that convincingly quantifies these benefits, *The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse* (<http://forum.savingplaces.org/connect/community-home/librarydocuments/viewdocument?DocumentKey=227592d3-53e7-4388-8a73-c2861f1070d8&CommunityKey=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&tab=librarydocuments>).
- Limiting the overflow of demolition materials in our landfill. Demolition is in direct opposition to the City’s zero-waste goal. A masonry house on a slab foundation—like the one at 2506 Great Oaks—cannot be relocated, and the majority of its building materials cannot be reused.
- Protecting our watersheds. This property directly abuts Shoal Creek. Demolition of the house will stir up waste materials that will flow into the creek, regardless of how careful and conscientious the demolition team is. The City’s commitment to watershed protection is clearly communicated in *Imagine Austin* as well.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any additional questions or concerns.

Very sincerely,



Emily Payne