



March 20, 2018

Austin City Council
PO Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767

Re: Rosewood Courts

Dear Council Members,

Mid Tex Mod is the nonprofit voice for preserving mid-century heritage in Central Texas. We respectfully support the Housing Authority of the City of Austin's (HACA) historic zoning proposal for Rosewood Courts and its associated preservation plan. Rosewood is a rare example of the Modern Movement, garden-style apartments which defined public housing prior to World War II, and is crucial to understanding our city's African American heritage. As such, this proposal represents a meaningful compromise solution for preserving Rosewood's architectural and cultural significance.

In February 2016 our organization submitted a letter supporting Council Member Ora Houston's resolution to initiate historic zoning for the entire Rosewood Courts site. As passed, that resolution directed Mid Tex Mod to participate in a working group to "provide options" for Rosewood's preservation. Evaluating those options entailed many hours of meetings and discussions. These were often difficult, but always productive and respectful.

The working group's efforts led to HACA's commissioning H+UO Architects' feasibility assessment in January 2017. We now have real-world, third-party cost estimates for rehabilitating Rosewoods' various building types. This was a huge step forward, turning assumptions into realities and making it clear that these buildings could be rehabbed for today's families, with original features restored.

The study also clarified that modern updates require reducing the number of apartments per unit, which means that rehabbing all of Rosewood's buildings would displace residents. With that in mind, and realistic cost estimates in hand, HACA committed to a compromise solution of preserving eight units, which will allow it to follow through on its promise for all residents to return after redevelopment.

The working group selected these eight units to best convey the site's integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. They are prominently grouped facing Chicon, maintaining a meaningful sense of Rosewood's streetscape and preserving the connection between its historic fabric and the community. They demonstrate Rosewood's original terraced plan, the carefully-orchestrated relationships between buildings, and the green space meant to be shared by tenants, all elements which make the development so architecturally significant. This is a vast improvement over previous plans to preserve a closely-grouped row of six buildings along the site's southern boundary, mostly hidden from public view.

HACA will rehabilitate these eight units according to the Secretary of Interior's Standards. This includes restoring defining features such as rooflines and trellises, and installing casements that approximate the originals. According to the compromise, the new construction and site plan will reflect Rosewood's historic character. HACA will seek a Texas Historical Commission subject marker interpreting Rosewood's significance. Historic zoning would firmly protect these rehabilitated buildings from demolition.

Mid Tex Mod supports the National Park Service's determination of eligibility for the entire Rosewood Courts site. Its nomination has not gone forward, however, and our priority as an advocacy organization is to preserve as much historic fabric as possible, in as meaningful a way as possible. In light of the complicated realities surrounding this issue, Mid Tex Mod supports the serious, multi-faceted preservation plan that comes from the working group's compromise. This will ensure that a third of the site will be protected for continued use by Rosewood families, and that historic interpretation will educate all Austinites about Rosewood's importance going forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Lindsey Derrington
President, Mid Tex Mod