

# ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

**CASE NUMBER:** C14H-2020-0087

**HLC DATE:**

10/26/2020

**PC DATE:**

10/27/2020

**APPLICANT:** Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas Baker LLC

**HISTORIC NAME:** Baker School

**WATERSHED:** Waller Creek

**Council District:** 9

**ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE:** 3908 Avenue B

**ZONING FROM:** GR-HD-NCCP-NP to GR-HD-H-NCCD-NP

**SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends the proposed zoning change to designate the former Baker School as a historic landmark.

**QUALIFICATIONS FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:**

Historical significance and community value.

**HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION:**

**PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:**

**DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:** The former Baker School is contributing to the Hyde Park Local Historic District.

**CITY COUNCIL DATE:**

**ACTION:**

**ORDINANCE READINGS:** 1<sup>ST</sup> 2<sup>ND</sup> 3<sup>RD</sup>

**ORDINANCE NUMBER:**

**CASE MANAGER:** Steve Sadowsky

**PHONE:** 974-6454

**NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION:** Hyde Park Neighborhood Association

**BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

**Architecture:**

While City Code does not allow a contributing building within a local historic district to be designated as a historic landmark for its architectural significance, the former Baker School is worthy of an architectural description as it reflects the work of three of the most prominent architects in Austin in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Built in 1911, the building is a raised two-story institutional building with a raised full basement. The building is constructed of Austin Common buff brick with poured concrete accents. The building has bands of five 2:2 windows with transoms in the principal block (these, while believed to be of historic age, are not original); the raised basement level also features bands of five 2:2 windows, but without transoms. The principal entry faces Avenue B, and has a brick portico that once had Doric columns and arched sides; the portico frames the raised and recessed entry, which features a double set of glazed wood doors. The portico has a small gablet at its center, echoing the gablet on the top of the building which has the inscription "Baker School." Additional

decorative aspects of the building include concrete bracket-like moldings in the at the top of the pilasters defining the bays, and a prominent cornice.

At the north and south ends of the original 1911 building are rectangular-shaped additions matching the height and configuration of the original block. These additions project proud of the main block of the building, and have a pair of 2:2 windows on each floor, all without transoms.

The solid appearance of the building hearkens to the Neo-Classical architecture popular for commercial and institutional buildings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The hallmarks of Neo-classical architecture are a grand scale, use of simple geometric forms, and classical ornamental details, all a reaction to the perceived frivolity of the Queen Anne and other Victorian-era architectural styles. This imposing building constructed of brick and concrete, replacing an older wood building, lends an air of permanency to the mission of education in Austin.

The original school building was designed by prominent local architect Roy Thomas, who also designed a 1958 addition to the rear of the building. Hugo Kuehne, a well-known and prolific local architect, designed the additions to the north and south ends of the original building in 1924. There is also a 1939 addition designed by noted local architects Kreisle and Brooks. There are two associated buildings on the northwest corner of the site: one built before 1940 to house a boiler, and the band room, constructed in 1958.

The current owners are painstakingly restoring and rehabilitating the original interior finishes and materials as part of their preservation and restoration of the historic building.

**Historical Associations:**

Baker School is one of the oldest school buildings in the city and exemplifies the important role that public schools played in Austin's history. Located in the Hyde Park neighborhood, developed in 1891 by Monroe Shipe as the city's first streetcar suburb, and designed to appeal to the upper middle class, Baker School was an essential feature in the new residential district.

Baker School replaced the older Hyde Park School established by Monroe Shipe, which was located on Speedway, when the older school proved inadequate for the rising population in the neighborhood. It was named for DeWitt Clinton Baker (1832-1881), who helped establish Austin's public school system, serving as the inspector of schools from 1872 to 1877, and as treasurer of the Austin Library Association, organized Austin's first public library. A businessman and a native of Portland, Maine, Baker also wrote several books on Texas history.

Baker School began as an elementary school for the children of Hyde Park, then became a middle school in 1973, and finally a high school (W.R. Robbins) in 1980. Baker was a neighborhood school for students in Hyde Park, and was renowned for quality education and an outstanding music program. The Austin Independent School District used the building for administrative offices before selling the property in 2019 to the owners of the Alamo Drafthouse, a national chain of movie theaters, which intends to use the building as their corporate offices.

**Community Value:**

Baker School exemplifies neighborhood schools in Austin at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the development of Austin's public school system. As a neighborhood landmark, Baker School has served as a focal point for social, educational, and cultural activities in the community.

Austin, like most Southern cities, lagged behind the rest of the country in developing a public school system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While older communities on the Eastern seaboard had strong traditions of public education by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most communities in Texas depended on tutors, subscription (private) schools, and churches to provide educational instruction for children. The Texas Constitution of 1876 provided for the Permanent School Fund, designed to provide revenue to public schools throughout the state. Austin established a school trustees board around the same time, and the first truly public school opened in Austin in 1882. There were other schools in the city already at that time, including some in African-American freedmen's settlements, but none employed public tax funds for their operation. Texas enacted its Compulsory Education Law in 1915, requiring all school-age children to attend school for at least a portion of every year. Baker School predates the Compulsory Education Law of 1915, which was responsible for a flurry of school building, including Mathews Elementary in West Austin, a historic landmark. The importance of public education reflects the transition of Austin from a frontier city to a city of culture with a literate population.

The appeal and success of Hyde Park as an upper middle class residential district depended upon the establishment of social, cultural, religious, and educational institutions for residents. The founders of Hyde Park recognized this, constructing the wood-frame Hyde Park School soon after the establishment of the neighborhood. Baker School reflects the continuing growth of Hyde Park and the need for a larger educational institution for the residents of the neighborhood. As one of the oldest school buildings remaining in Austin, it is remarkably intact and satisfies the Community Value criterion for its place in the overall image of Austin and for the Hyde Park neighborhood in particular.

**PARCEL NO.:** 0219050303

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Lot 78, Hyde Park Addition No. 2

**ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT:** \$62,290. Total estimated tax liability before abatement: \$268,291

**APPRAISED VALUE:** \$11,841,067

**PRESENT USE:** Under renovation

**CONDITION:** Excellent

**PRESENT OWNERS:**

Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas Baker, LLC  
3908 Avenue B  
Austin, Texas 78751

**DATE BUILT:** ca. 1911

**ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS:** Additions in 1924, 1939, and 1958 as described above.

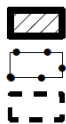
**ORIGINAL OWNER(S):** Austin Independent School District

**OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS:** Contributing to the Hyde Park Historic District



Photo from KUT post on the sale of the school.





SUBJECT TRACT  
PENDING CASE  
ZONING BOUNDARY

#### NOTIFICATIONS

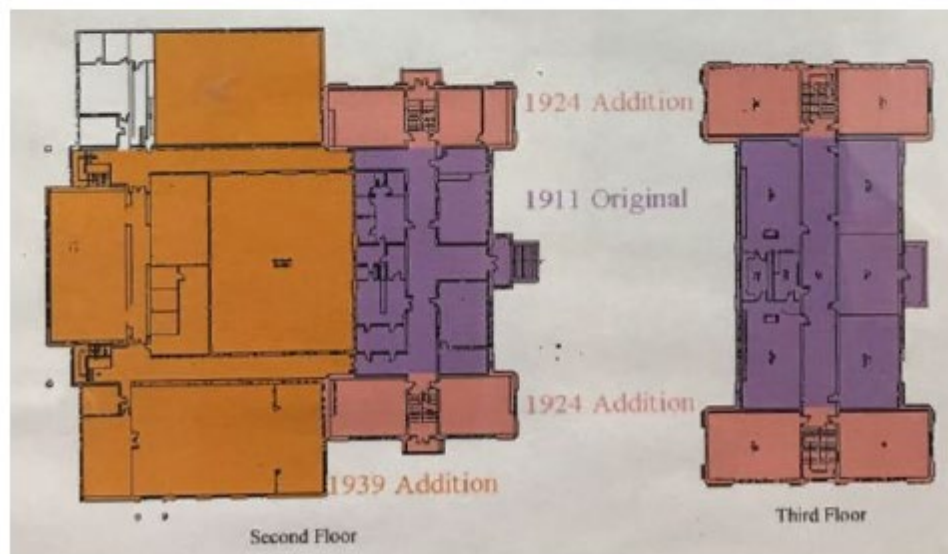
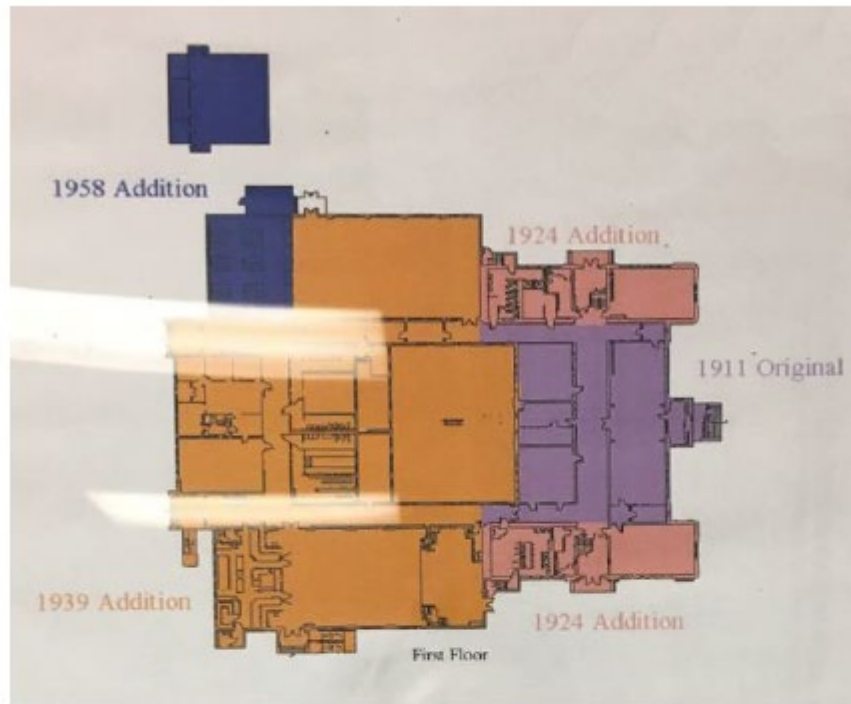
CASE#: C14H-2020-0087  
LOCATION: 3908 AVENUE B

1" = 333'

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ORIGINAL BAKER SCHOOL COMPLETED 1911 (SOUTHEAST ELEVATION)

Note: the entry shown in this photograph has been modified, but this photo shows the original design intent of Neo-Classical architecture with the columned and arcaded front portico. Also of note are the multi-light windows that have since been replaced.



ORIGINAL CLASSROOM SHOWING CHALKBOARDS, TRIM, DOORS AND TRANSOM

**From:** Pete Gilcrease

**Sent:** Thursday, October 22, 2020 11:41 AM

**To:** Flores, Yvette - BC <bc-Yvette.Flores@austintexas.gov>; Hempel, Claire - BC <BC-Claire.Hempel@austintexas.gov>; Anderson, Greg - BC <bc-Greg.Anderson@austintexas.gov>; Thompson, Jeffrey - BC <bc-Jeffrey.Thompson@austintexas.gov>; Howard, Patrick - BC <BC-Patrick.Howard@austintexas.gov>; Azhar, Awais - BC <BC-Awais.Azhar@austintexas.gov>

**Cc:** Rivera, Andrew <Andrew.Rivera@austintexas.gov>; Rusthoven, Jerry <Jerry.Rusthoven@austintexas.gov>

**Subject:** Friends of Hyde Park Opposes Baker Center Historic Designation Rezoning

\*\*\* External Email - Exercise Caution \*\*\*

Historic Commission Meeting: October 26, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting: October 27, 2020

Austin City Council Meeting: November 12, 2020

Case Number: C14H-2020-0087

Project Location: 3908 Avenue B

Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council,

Friends of Hyde Park strongly opposes the rezoning of the Baker Center to include historic zoning (-H). This rezoning will remove almost all opportunities for affordable housing on the property in the future and should be strongly opposed by the Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and the City Council. The Baker Center property is already zoned within the Hyde Park Local Historic District (-HD) and there is no need to also zone the property with the further historic (-H) restriction.

Making a property historic has been known to make it hard or impossible to add housing to any part of the property, even the parking lots. Parking lots cover a considerable amount of the Baker School property and could be a great way to add affordable housing around the existing building. A previous example is the Dabney-Horne House at 507 W 23rd from [February 23, 2014](#). It was zoned historic and the property owners wanted to add additional housing on the parking lot next to the historic zoned house and it was rejected. These types of barriers to housing and large parking lots are unnecessary and harm affordability and alternative transportation options in Austin.

When the Alamo Draffhouse was originally purchasing the property [in 2018, Friends of Hyde Park was very concerned](#) that Alamo had no intention of ever building any housing on the property, which was a requirement for them in order to qualify for the purchase of the property from AISD. We were concerned that Alamo only included the designs for additional and affordable housing in their proposal as a way to purchase the property under market value from AISD so Alamo could use the property solely for their headquarters. Our concerns were based on two meetings Friends of Hyde Park had with the architect for the project. Their proposal was hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars lower than what AISD could have otherwise received from another buyer, which deprived our schools, teachers, and children of much needed revenue and [led to a lawsuit](#) for AISD not disclosing how they selected their preferred bid and if favoritism had anything to do with the bid selection process.

Friends of Hyde Park was right about Alamo not adding affordable housing to this site like they promised the community in 2018, since none has been added and there are no plans to add any. Friends of Hyde Park is now concerned that this zoning request could be a short-term strategy to increase the value of the land before a potential sale of the property since [Alamo is having financial troubles](#) due to COVID-



19. Additionally, a historic designation on the property would dramatically reduce the amount of property taxes that Alamo would pay yearly. The Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council should reject zoning decisions that could simply be to benefit this property owner financially in the short term and instead should be considering the long term impacts of this rezoning to Austin and the potential future affordable housing lost.

Friends of Hyde Park is already very concerned with the amount of complex zoning restrictions that were previously placed on the Baker Center land when the Planning Commission and City Council rezoned the property in 2018 to be part of the Neighborhood Conservation Combining District (NCCD), which Friends of Hyde Park opposed. These extreme zoning restrictions already place a large burden on the amount of housing and affordable housing that could be built on site. Adding historic zoning on top of all of the other restrictions will be a huge loss to our neighborhood and Austin as a source for future affordable housing. If affordable housing is something that our city values, this zoning request will be soundly rejected.

Friends of Hyde Park membership previously voted on the Baker Center. **101 members voted and 86% of those that voted approved** of the “site to be developed to allow the maximum amount of housing and/or walkable neighborhood amenities that would benefit the neighborhood. If residential use is included, options should include affordable housing units.” The majority view on what should be allowed on this site is not being taken into account with the proposed historic zoning.

### **Information About Friends of Hyde Park**

Friends of Hyde Park is currently the largest neighborhood association in our neighborhood with over 500 current members (approximately 50% renters and 50% homestead homeowners). Friends of Hyde Park advocates for more affordable housing and a more walkable, bikeable, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and transit friendly neighborhood.

Contact:

Board of Directors of Friends of Hyde Park

Pete Gilcrease  
Thomas Ates  
Matt Desloge  
Teresa Griffin  
Tania Oropeza  
Scott Snyder