

July 26, 2021

Ms. Terri Myers, Chair
Historic Landmark Commission
City of Austin

Dear Ms. Myers and Commissioners:

As Chancellor of Austin Community College District, I am writing to set out the College's response to the staff recommendation to postpone action on the College's demolition permit application for its property located at 812 W 12th Street. Staff's recommendation is to postpone action so it can consider alternatives to demolition or determine whether to initiate historical zoning on this property. The College opposes both of these options.

ACC is a peer governmental entity to the City, and has its own public processes and elected officials who make decisions about how the College will perform its governmental functions. The ACC Board of Trustees is an elected body, charged with governing and overseeing the operation and management of the College.

The City Staff property evaluation we saw for the first time on Thursday July 22 states "none of these businesses [which occupied the building between 1946 and 1959] were significant in their own right and would not qualify this building for landmark designation under the criterion for historical associations," and that there is "not a significant natural or designed landscape with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the center." The property was not analyzed under the Archeological criterion.

The staff report acknowledges that there is no historic significance to the building's tenants in the period 1946-1959. There is no finding that this was or is a type of building that was historically significant in Austin's development. The criteria identified by staff as relating to the historical value of this building were "Architecture" and "Community Value."

This building (among others) has been identified in ACC's Campus Master plan for demolition for at least the past ten years. The ACC Board most recently reviewed the updated master plan for this campus multiple times in 2020. The Master Plan clearly shows this building being demolished to allow expansion of ACC's existing multi-level parking garage, to better serve the students and community partners attending the Rio Grande Campus without having to park along the neighborhood streets. This aspect of the Campus Master Plan has remained consistent since it was first discussed in ACC's public documents regarding future expansion in 2007 and was incorporated into the first Rio Grande Campus master plan in 2011 by vote of the ACC Board of Trustees in a public meeting.

July 26, 2021

Page Two

ACC also has a Regional Advisory Committee made up of citizens from the Central Austin area and that body has reviewed and approved the current Rio Grande Campus master plan, which as noted is largely the same as the master plan adopted by the ACC Board in 2011. This property was bought by ACC in 2009 specifically to give the College the ability to expand the parking garage to serve the proposed renovated and expanded Rio Grande Campus, which is now ready to open this Fall.

As fellow stewards of community assets, ACC has routinely acted to preserve Austin's heritage, while still meeting its public mission of equitably educating students and developing the workforce to support Austin's economy. Examples of ACC's commitment to preserving Austin's heritage include the \$80 million renovation of the main building at the Rio Grande Campus, the old Austin High School which was originally built in 1916. Another example is the conversion of the former Austin High School gymnasium (located just north on West Avenue from this property) to offices and classroom space which preserved the exterior of that building as well.

The Staff report does not identify any historic preservation criteria that apply to this building, other than it is an example of a neighborhood-scale commercial building that served the surrounding residential neighborhood. Interestingly, this single fact is used to support two criteria (Architecture and Community value). However, that surrounding residential neighborhood has been converted over the years to commercial spaces, offices, etc., as noted in the staff report. Given this fact, it seems questionable to identify this building as having any particular "community value" as the residential community this building served in the historic period no longer exists.

Given the limited historical value of the building, ACC has determined that it is in the best interests of the College and the community it serves to expand ACC's parking garage to better serve the renovated and expanding Rio Grande Campus.

At this time, we respectfully request that the Commission vote to approve the demolition permit for this building, so the College can move forward with its Master Plan for this Campus.

Sincerely,



Richard M. Rhodes, Ph.D.
Chancellor

RMR/pws

xc: Council Member Kathie Tovo, District 9