

## Summary of Public Feedback

*At the Urban Renewal Board's meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup>, item 2e on the agenda was related to the attached letter from the Austin Revitalization Authority. The Board received 110 emails, the majority of which contained the text below. Emails that contained additional text expressed the same sentiment that the Board should not accept an unsolicited proposal.*

Board Members:

I am writing to voice STRONG opposition to ARA's request to circumvent the public RFP process and submit an Unsolicited Proposal to develop and own Urban Renewal Agency's Block 18 property at 1100 East 11th and Juniper Streets (location of Kenny Dorham's Backyard).

- ARA has been the City's 'developer of choice' for this section of East 11th Street for 20 years.
- Though they are already the developer/owner of more commercial real estate space on East 11th Street than any other entity, during these 20 years their efforts to address cultural preservation, arts/culture/entertainment and the creative industries is totally lacking. They have primarily engaged in commercial development and ownership activities.
- Were it not for passage of the September 2 Council Agenda item #48 (support for the African American Cultural Heritage District and establishment of the Kenny Dorham Center), ARA already had a pre-packaged commercial mixed-use development plan ready to submit for this property as an Unsolicited Proposal. That plan was NOT for an exclusively dedicated creative industries arts and cultural hub institution.
- ARA is a nonprofit community development corporation whose stated mission and goals, in part, are affordability, small business development/ownership, historic and cultural preservation, and revitalization of a dynamic entertainment and cultural street scene for what was once Black East Austin, yet it seems their quest continues to be development and ownership of property. What is the evidence that they have even approximated these other aims after 20 years?
- ARA's most recent development on Urban Renewal property (on Juniper St) resulted in townhomes, priced between \$750k-\$1M. 16-18 units, with 2 'affordable' units. After approximately 5 years, those 2 'affordable' units are yet to be occupied. Why would the Urban Renewal Board turn over to ARA yet another parcel of publicly-owned commercial real estate in what is designated as the core of the Cultural Heritage District?
- If the public process for developing Block 18 is to be circumvented, it makes sense for the Urban Renewal Board, Austin Economic Development Corp, and the Creative Spaces Bond Committee to work with the East Austin Creative Coalition (conceptual originator/designer of the cultural center model) to develop a world-class cultural institution and home-base for the sustaining cultural arts organization who developed the idea. East 11th Street does not need another developer-owned mixed-use building, the need is for a generational cultural arts INSTITUTION.
- 20 years ago Harold McMillan, founder DiverseArts and the East Austin Creative Coalition, conceived, designed, and planned the structure of the African American Cultural Heritage District AND the Kenny Dorham Center Cultural Institution. At that time, he presented these plans to ARA for

development as ARA projects. At that time, the Austin Revitalization Authority chose not to pursue either of these projects as part of their mission to Revitalize·Respect·Restore.

Unless the disposition of Block 18 is to be totally restructured, ARA should compete in the public process like everyone else. It's better to take a little more time and get it right. We've waited 20 years, another 18 months is insignificant at this point.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important issue.



Willis Hunt – ARA Board Chair | Gregory L. Smith – President & CEO

October 8, 2021

Dear Urban Renewal Commissioners,

As many of you know, the Austin Revitalization Authority (ARA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that has been in existence for over twenty-five years. Our mission is to encourage commercial, residential, and cultural development that promotes community well-being while respecting the people, the institutions and the history of East Austin and other underserved communities. Today, among many other roles, ARA owns and manages the Street-Jones and Snell Buildings on the East 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, which provide essential commercial and retail spaces in the African-American Cultural Heritage District. ARA also owns and manages two restored historic buildings, the Haehnel Building and the Herman Schieffer House, and a dynamic food truck park on the corridor, encouraging further economic vibrancy in the District. In addition, ARA maintains Dr. Charles Urdy Plaza, the creation of which it facilitated in 2002.

With a strong desire to continue the legacy of East Austin, ARA has been diligently preparing a development proposal for Blocks 16 and 18 to meet and/or exceed the Urban Renewal Agency's standards for accepting an unsolicited proposal, as well as, your development priorities for the corridor. On September 2nd, City Council approved [Resolution #20210902-048](#), which in conjunction with providing substantial tools to achieve a more robust manifestation of the African-American Cultural District, also outlined priorities for the Cultural Heritage District. ARA's proposal addresses the majority of the priorities articulated in the September 2<sup>nd</sup> Resolution.

Current criteria prohibit the Urban Renewal Agency from accepting ARA's unsolicited proposals because it requires modifications to the current zoning regulations. City Council is scheduled to consider proposed modifications to the East 11<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood Conservation Combining District (NCCD) on October 21<sup>st</sup>. ARA support the URA's recommended modifications, which gives the most flexibility for development within the NCCD. Upon City Council approval of the proposed modifications, ARA will finalize its proposal for submittal shortly thereafter.

We understand that the URA is currently preparing a time-consuming process to conduct a community engagement initiative, develop a Request for Proposals and scoring matrix, and initiate a solicitation process to select a responsive proposal. At a minimum, this would result in a year-long process before a responsive proposal is selected. Alternatively, ARA's unsolicited proposals that are in compliance with priorities identified by both the URB and City Council's [Resolution #20210902-048](#) would require approximately 60 days to review and accept once received.



**Willis Hunt – ARA Board Chair | Gregory L. Smith – President & CEO**

In closing, we strongly support the URA's recommended modifications to the 11<sup>th</sup> Street NCCD and would encourage that the most expedient and respectful process is selected to develop the remaining two Urban Renewal blocks in the African-American Cultural Heritage District.

We look forward to collaborating with the Urban Renewal Agency in fostering a thriving Cultural Heritage District for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gregory L. Smith", is written over the printed name and title.

Gregory L. Smith  
President & CEO