



MEMORANDUM

To: Mrs. Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
Mayor Steve Adler
Members of Council

From: Council Member Ora Houston, District 1

Date: September 29, 2017

Subject: Rosewood Courts Preservation Plan

On February 25th 2016 the City Council of Austin, Texas passed a resolution directing the City Manager to present options to the City Council for the historic zoning of Rosewood Courts. That timeline was subsequently amended twice by resolutions on June 9, 2016 and September 22, 2016 in order for any and all interests to come to a consensus on a preservation plan that satisfies the concerns of the community and of the property owner. The requirements of the entities included, without limitation, are individuals who call Rosewood Courts home, the Housing Authority of the City of Austin, neighborhood associations, Preservation Austin, Mid Tex Mod, other professionals in the field of architecture, and the Council District Office.

Over the past year, great strides have been made between the redevelopment and the historic preservation that was envisioned for Rosewood Courts. As a result of the collaboration and cooperation of the "Rosewood Reboot," a preservation plan has been agreed upon by all interested parties who were willing to engage in constructive dialogue and negotiate an outcome that looks different than anyone imagined. The preservation plan that is being proposed is one that seeks to maximize the benefit to the Housing Authority of the City of Austin and preserve and rehabilitate eight buildings which respect the original styles found in the vision for low-income housing for Americans of African Ancestry in 1939. The Preservation Plan will maintain elements of compatibility through design standards, because there is agreement that good design does not cost more than bad design. There is also agreement that the International Style of design is one that sought to achieve quality-of-life benchmarks that today the City of Austin strive to produce by means which are modest and thoughtful.

As per the Preservation Plan, the eight buildings which have been selected for preservation will not only preserve the architectural integrity of the built environment but also the landscape features which together form the content and tell the story of Rosewood Courts. The history before the Courts were built tell a broader story of an active political culture in our City government, in

the time of Jim Crow, that was arguably more progressive in some ways than we find today: the goal of the development was to satisfy the human need for shelter without regard to the color of one's skin or income, during the time of legal segregation. The construction of three public housing developments was an achievement of Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson on behalf of the people of Austin in the early days of public housing in the United States.

Attached is the final draft of the preservation plan dated May 22, 2017 that was written by the facilitator who graciously donated her expertise, time and energy to this re-envisioning process, Ms. Laura Toups. The preservation plan was ratified by the members of the Rosewood Reboot Working Group at the end of August. This document will remain the foundational and guiding document for the redevelopment and preservation of Rosewood Courts. The brief was circulated to the parties involved in the conversations to ensure full transparency between the parties in the "Rosewood Reboot" group. This brief also represents a preservation plan which allows us to honor the history of the built environment, the many Negroes who helped build the foundation of the city we call home, and meet the City of Austin's need for an increase in the housing supply, rental and homeownership, in the heart of the fastest gentrified zip code in the City – 78702.

Through the proposed creation of the eight-building historic district, Rosewood Courts will continue to be an ever-present symbol of President Johnson's goal of income-accessible housing for individuals who make low or no wages. It is our expectation that the next iteration of Rosewood Courts will be one of lasting quality and utility for individuals who meet the income guidelines as it has been for Austinites over the last eighty years.

This re-envisioning process has the potential to be a model for the redevelopment of other public housing projects. It is my hope that the work of the "Rosewood Reboot" will be received, respected and moved forward through the appropriate process to implementation.

PRESERVATION PRINCIPLES

Given that:

1. The City Council of the City of Austin voted on February 25, 2016 to initiate historic zoning for Rosewood Courts in cooperation with the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA), Preservation Austin, and Mid Tex Mod. Council further resolved to support Rosewood Courts' inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. This resolution was presented by Council Member Ora Houston.
2. The National Park Service has deemed Rosewood Courts eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for national significance under Criteria A, properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and Criteria B, that are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past.
3. H+UO Architects prepared *Rosewood Courts: Preservation Economic Feasibility Assessment*, commissioned by HACA and completed in March 2017. HACA, Preservation Austin, and Mid Tex Mod contributed to developing the firm's scope of work and gave feedback regarding the assessment's development and final report. The report developed renovation and treatment plans for three building types on the Rosewood Courts site. The preservation rehabilitation strategies are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and include cost estimates for each approach.
4. Given that Rosewood Courts is both a historic site and an active public housing property, HACA needs to both honor and balance the requirements of the US Dept. of the Interior and the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.
5. HACA envisions, at a minimum, 124 public housing replacement units, 76 additional rental units consisting of market rate, 80% or below, and 60% affordable housing units, and up to 25 home ownership units on site as part of its redevelopment plan. This will include the demolition of seventeen of the 25 original buildings on the site.
6. Recognizing that limited federal funding to effectively operate and maintain public housing has been on a continual decline, the project to redevelop Rosewood Courts will be contingent on HACA's ability to secure sufficient funding from various sources, both federal and non-federal. Based on:
 - a. the assumption that sufficient funding will be secured for the redevelopment of Rosewood Courts at the density and unit types indicated above, and
 - b. current pricing estimates from the H+UO feasibility assessment,HACA is committed to preserving eight of the site's original buildings.
7. The preservation community desires to preserve as many historic structures, and as much of the historic landscape, as possible, with the understanding that preserved building exteriors will be rehabilitated in an appropriate manner and according to the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. The preservation community understands that based on current cost estimates, eight buildings can be preserved.
8. HACA, the City and the preservation community all agree upon the importance of the appropriate protection and recognition of this historic site, using all available and appropriate designations, including local historic designation zoning, county historic markers and possible listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The working group evaluated existing buildings' potential for preservation based on the following criteria:

1. Buildings should read as a cohesive group to provide a sense of site, time and place.
2. The relationship between buildings, including the green space and terraced landscape, are integral to the complex's original design and should be an important component of the final preservation plan.
3. Visibility of original buildings from either Chicon Street or Rosewood Avenue is a priority.

Going forward:

1. A grouping of eight buildings was selected by HACA, Preservation Austin, and Mid Tex Mod for preservation according to the above criteria. These buildings will be the foundation of the preservation plan developed as part of the redevelopment of Rosewood Courts.
2. As stated on the National Park Service website "*The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are a series of concepts about maintaining, repairing, and replacing historic materials, as well as designing new additions or making alterations. The Guidelines offer general design and technical recommendations to assist in applying the Standards to a specific property. Together, they provide a framework and guidance for decision-making about work or changes to a historic property*". Exteriors of preserved buildings will be rehabilitated, to the greatest extent feasible, according to the H+UO interventions described and estimated in the final report using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines. This includes, but is not limited to, the restoration of buildings' flat roofs, windows, exterior doors, and re-creation of steel porch details, all features of their design at the time of construction. Site features such as retaining walls and landscaping located between, and within the immediate vicinity of, the eight buildings will be included and rehabilitated as elements of the preservation. Site features will be maintained and improved in compliance with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Uniform Physical Condition Standards, required accessibility improvements and according to the Standards and Guidelines above.
3. Preservation Austin and Mid Tex Mod will work with HACA and the City of Austin's Historic Preservation Office and Historic Landmark Commission to designate the selected grouping of eight buildings and associated green space as a local historic district. All parties will work to find various funding sources for the costs associated with the designations, including grants, waivers or community philanthropic contributions.
4. HACA will work with the Texas Historical Commission to apply for historical markers for Emancipation Park and Rosewood Courts. Preservation Austin and Mid Tex Mod will provide assistance as needed and support HACA's efforts to seek necessary funding and/or waivers of state and local fees to apply for historical markers.
5. Any historical markers or designations sought by HACA must not impede or restrict the redevelopment of the remainder of the site, including the creation of the minimum number of units indicated above by HACA.
6. Council Member Houston's office, Preservation Austin, and Mid Tex Mod will work to encourage necessary changes to the pending National Register nomination, as required by the National Park Service, Secretary of Interior, to allow the site to be listed under Criteria A and/or B. HACA supports this listing under Criteria A and/or B.

7. New construction, and the new site plan, on the Rosewood Courts site should complement the preserved buildings and setting which define the site's historic design.
8. It is understood that the scale, proportion, detailing, features, materials that reference the original buildings will be complementary and compatible without mimicking. The Secretary of Interior Standards will be reviewed, as needed, for new construction. It is also acknowledged additional height will be needed for some buildings to achieve HACA's building program.
9. All available tax credits, incentives and other sources of funding specific to historic preservation should be explored and, if eligible, utilized to the fullest extent possible.
10. It is understood that the criteria and principles stipulated in this document are specific to Rosewood Courts and do not transfer to other HACA properties.
11. Based on this set of agreed upon principles, Preservation Austin and Mid Tex Mod support and endorse this compromise to preserve the identified group of eight buildings and associated green space in the redevelopment of Rosewood Courts by HACA.

