

Attachment 1

Memorandum

June 10, 2010

To: Urban Renewal Agency Board Members
From: Sean Garretson
Cc: Anthony Snipes
Susan Rocha
Betsy Spencer
Sandra Harkins
Gina Copic
Tom Hatch
Clifford Gillard (Victory Grill)
Harold McMillan (Diverse Arts)
Lisa Byrd (ProArts)
Greg Smith (Austin Revitalization Authority)
Michael Casias (East Village)
Mark Rogers (Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation)

Subject: Block 18 Interim Use Plan

Per the Urban Renewal Agency's discussion at the May 17th board meeting regarding an interim use plan for Block 18, I met with primary stakeholders of Block 18 on May 26th. I regret that I will be out of the State on vacation during the next URB meeting, so I offer the following summary of the meeting and recommendations for the board's consideration.

Individuals in attendance at this informal meeting included: Greg Smith of the Austin Revitalization Authority (ARA), Lisa Byrd of ProArts, Harold McMillan of Diverse Arts, Clifford Gillard representing Victory Grill, Tom Hatch (who volunteered to facilitate the discussion and site planning), Michael Casias (who provided one of his East Village units for our discussion – giving us a bird's eye perspective of Block 18), and Mark Rogers of Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation and representing neighborhood perspectives.

We began the discussion by sharing each individual's interests and concerns of Block 18. Here is a summary of stakeholders' perspective:

- ARA is working with City and plans to submit site plan for East Room in approximately one month, and anticipates approximately six months for approval before they can make improvements. They will attempt to ask City if they can move building to eventual permanent location prior to site plan approval. Their site plan will show approximately 6-8 parking spaces on site, just to the south of their building. ARA estimates that renovation will cost approximately \$500,000. They also anticipate eventually building smaller live/work spaces at the corner of 11th street on their site.
- The Victory Grill has estimates for improvements to their building – mostly fortification and plumbing/electrical work to cost approximately \$100-150,000. I also learned for the first time that the URB owns a small sliver of land to the west of the Victory Grill building, including the large concrete slab that is in front of the beautiful mural on the western wall of the Victory Grill.
- Lisa Byrd gave an overview of her and Harold's efforts to establish the African American Cultural and Heritage District and strongly suggested that the Victory Grill is the epicenter of this District.

- Much of the discussion focused on the fencing around ARA's land and around Kenny Dorham's Backyard (that the URB leases to Diverse Arts), and how that fencing is aesthetically not the best to have in a corridor we are trying to revitalize. While fencing is necessary for Diverse Arts to control crowds and receive payment for tickets to events, the events are only held twice a month on average. Necessary elements on the site include portable toilets during events, electrical outlets, and storage. Several events have been cancelled due to even a light rain on the stage that has no permanent shelter.

The following recommendations were discussed and agreed upon by all parties as worth pursuing, pending URB approval:

- Present a draft site plan for the entire site – including Kenny Dorham's Backyard, Victory Grill, ARA/East Room, Juniper lot(s) on Block 18, and the URB property adjacent to Victory Grill. Elements of this site plan that will be presented to the URB when the site plan is completed (probono) by Tom Hatch, include:
 - Opening up the entire Kenny Dorham site from 11th Street to Juniper so that the entire site can be used as **public open space**, then closed off during concerts and events. This community gathering space could be used for brown bag jazz concerts at lunch, children's activities, and similar elements);
 - Change the fencing around ARA's property and around Kenny Dorham's backyard so that it doesn't appear as "harsh" as the current fencing appears;
 - Place temporary public art and possibly water features on the URB property bordering Juniper;
 - Consider adding parking behind Victory Grill to accommodate additional patrons to Victory Grill;
 - Place mobile restaurants/trailers on the south end of ARA's property, abutting East 11th Street. ARA would be interested in lease revenue and the activity would be good for the corridor. Parking is a concern of neighbors so we will need to ensure sufficient parking. ARA suggested they may be able to allow their parking spaces next to the East Room to be used outside of business hours.
 - Improve the site area adjacent to Victory Grill that the URB owns to make this space usable as an outdoor/covered space by Victory Grill; and
 - Make overall grading improvements to the site, particularly where the current stage is located as well as trimming and possibly removing trees that pose a safety risk.

Immediate steps (June/July 2010) that can be taken, pending approval by respective board and organizations:

- Finalize and approve site plan (July URB Meeting).
- Remove barbed wire fencing surrounding East Room and replace with Public Art (eg., murals painted on large plywood sheets, or signage suggesting "Another East End Improvement Project Coming" and attached to existing fencing – sans barbed wire) – prior to East End's 4th Friday in late June and grand opening of East Village.
- Consider asking ARA to clean up/maintain Kenny Dorham's Backyard as they do for other URB properties.
- Identify how the City can fast track the ARA's site plan approval (decreasing processing time).
- Examine the feasibility of placing mobile restaurants/trailers on the south side of ARA's property.
- Finalize cost estimates for improved fencing around Kenny Dorham's backyard.
- Finalize cost estimates for Victory Grill improvements.
- Finalize cost estimates for URB property adjacent to Victory Grill, including awning or covered area.

Mid-term steps (August – September 2010):

- Present plan to Adjacent neighbors (particularly along Juniper) to obtain feedback
- Apply to City of Austin's new Neighborhood Improvement Grant program
- Apply for grant funding (ProArts to take lead)

Long-term steps (October – December 2010)

- Obtain grant funds for Victory Grill and Block 18 site improvements
- Make improvements to Victory Grill and Kenny Dorham's Backyard
- Make improvements to East Room and ARA property