

March 17, 2014

Dr. Jane Rivera
Chairperson
Parks and Recreation Board
City of Austin
City Hall
301 W. 2nd Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Use of 401 W. St. Johns Street

Dear Chair Rivera:

Whereas the Pedestrian Advisory Council (PAC) is in nascent form, without official members or a chair to submit a recommendation on the group's behalf, I submit this letter to you as PAC staff reflecting the group's recommendation regarding the use of land being considered for 401 W. St. Johns Street. The language of this letter was approved by those in attendance at the PAC March 3, 2014 meeting and an official vote count is included of all members of the public in the audience.

The PAC was formed in summer 2013 in order to advise City of Austin and other entities on pedestrian planning, design, funding, and enforcement efforts regarding the creation, maintenance and operation of pedestrian facilities in order to ensure a safe and enjoyable circulation for both commuting and recreation within the City of Austin. The PAC's goal is to ensure sensitivity to pedestrian issues in the design and implementation of all public and private projects impacting pedestrians. As such, the PAC supports the most pedestrian-friendly use for 401 West St. Johns.

At the March 3rd PAC meeting Marla Schmitz, Chair of the Highland Neighborhood Association Park Committee, appeared before the group to explain that the City is considering future uses for the property at 401 W. St. Johns. She presented that the majority of the Highland neighborhood does not meet the Austin City Council goal that all residents within the City's urban core live within a 1/4 mile walking distance of a park and that the Highland neighborhood is "park deficient" according to the Parks Department Gap Analysis. Highland residents must currently drive to reach a neighborhood park, the closest being Brentwood Park, which requires crossing Airport Boulevard and Lamar, both major thoroughfares.

Ms. Schmitz also stated that 401 W. St. Johns is very accessible to the pedestrian population of the neighborhood as well as those biking and utilizing public transportation. It is centrally located within the neighborhood, situated on the Northcrest and the St. Johns (to be constructed this summer) bike routes, and in close proximity to the Guadalupe bike trail. It is within walking distance of Highland ACC, Airport Boulevard, North Lamar, the Crestview and Highland train stations. Additionally there have been positive discussions with different City departments regarding creating a trail along Waller Creek, which spans the majority of Highland neighborhood and would connect 401 W. St. Johns to Reilly Elementary.

Ms. Schmitz shared that the site is currently leased to the University Hills Optimists youth sports

organization. It is estimated only six of the 406 participants live in the Highland neighborhood. Hence, approximately 400 participants drive to the site.

After consideration of the above points, the group voted 19-0 in support of the main purpose of 401 W. St. Johns being to provide amenities to serve the pedestrian population able to access the site, as well as for water quality. In light of the Parks Service Gap Analysis and the City Council goal of walkable parks within 1/4 mile of all residents in the urban core, the option which would best serve pedestrians is using the site as a public park, along with serving the additional purpose of enhancing water quality.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding the recommendations of the Pedestrian Advisory Council.

Sincerely,



Robert Anderson,
Community Transformation Grant Planner and Pedestrian Advisory Council Staff
City of Austin Planning and Development Review Department

cc: Pedestrian Advisory Council
Sara Hensley, Director, Parks and Recreation Department
April Shaw, Research Analyst, Senior, Parks and Recreation Department
Highland Neighborhood Association Executive Committee