



Housing Authority of the City of Austin

Established in 1937

Board of Commissioners,
Carl S. Richie, Jr., Chairman
Charles Bailey
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Isaac Robinson

President & CEO
Michael G. Gerber

Mr. Steve Sadowsky
Historic Preservation Officer
City of Austin
505 Barton Springs Road, 5th Fl.
Austin, TX 78704

Dear Mr. Sadowsky:

Re: Case Number C14H-2015-0008

On behalf of the Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA), I am writing to share our opposition to initiation of a historic rezoning case for Rosewood Courts, a public housing property owned and operated by HACA at the corner of Rosewood Avenue and Chicon Street.

HACA is a separate unit of local government under the Texas Local Government Code, authorized by the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. Thanks to Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson's efforts, we consider ourselves to be the first public housing authority in the United States. HACA is a HUD-designated high performer agency in the management and administration of our public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs.

Built in 1937 of cinder-block construction, the barracks-style Rosewood Courts property faces significant structural and systems challenges. These include outdated plumbing, gas and electrical systems and a terraced footprint that presents navigation challenges for those with physical limitations. Individual unit issues including interior brick walls, small rooms, narrow concrete stairwells, no air conditioning, inadequate moisture control, poorly insulated windows and a lack of modern amenities further compound the infrastructure challenges.

As a 2012 Choice Neighborhoods Initiative planning grant awardee, HACA, along with its co-grantee the City of Austin's Neighborhood Housing and Community Development, engaged the greater community in an extensive planning process to re-envision a revitalized Rosewood Courts. As one of the oldest public housing properties in the nation, Rosewood Courts exclusively housed low-income African-Americans during a time of segregation. The property is built on one of the original Emancipation Parks in east Austin, and HACA agrees that Rosewood's ties to then-Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson and the 1937 Housing Act make the property a candidate for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places under categories A and B.

HACA fully recognizes the historical significance of Rosewood Courts and is committed to the historic preservation of various property components as presented in numerous community meetings, on HACA's Rosewood Choice Neighborhoods website, and in the Rosewood Choice Neighborhoods Plan submitted to HUD. This commitment is reflected in the community-driven proposed housing plan created with the input of many community stakeholders, Rosewood Courts families, and neighborhood members. The plan is available for anyone to review at www.rosewoodchoice.com and is supported by the Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods, the Rosewood Courts/Salina Apartments Resident Council, the HACA citywide tenants association – City-Wide Advisory Board, and a multitude of stakeholder organizations including HousingWorks, Accessible Housing Austin, ADAPT, Family Eldercare, Communities in Schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, Goodwill, LifeWorks, United Way for Greater Austin, Frost Bank, CommUnity Care, Caritas and the Emerging Growth Business Incubator to name a few.

*"We envision neighborhoods where poverty is alleviated,
communities are healthy and safe, and all people can achieve their full potential"*

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Elements of the proposed Rosewood Courts historical preservation component include full preservation of at least six residential buildings (at least one-fourth of the site) and creation of a commemorative Emancipation Park that will be open to the public for community events and celebrations. It is HACA's desire to hold a design competition that engages the east Austin community in helping to select the most ideal design elements for the park.

Another element of the proposed Rosewood Courts redevelopment plan includes the construction of twenty-five single-family houses and townhomes for first-time homebuyers. Additionally, HACA is committed to not only rebuilding all 124 units of public housing that currently exist, but also building 76 additional housing units that would be available to families earning low to moderate incomes. This increase in multifamily units helps to preserve and increase affordable housing options for families who would otherwise not be able to afford to live within Austin due to steadily increasing rent prices.

As noted already, HACA is committed to preserving, interpreting and celebrating the historical significance of Rosewood Courts. We respectfully request that HACA be unencumbered to implement its community-driven and supported plan to revitalize Rosewood Courts, incorporating its historic preservation elements. Therefore, we oppose the unnecessary initiation of a historic rezoning case for this property.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Gerber", is written in a cursive style.

Michael Gerber
President and CEO