

From: [JC](#)
To: [Sadowsky, Steve](#); [Guernsey, Greg](#)
Subject: Re: Shocked By Staff Recommendation on Watchhill House
Date: Monday, September 28, 2015 9:39:22 AM

Mrs Coleen Hardin who is 92 years old and sent in a letter to you about the alterations that also was not in the packet to the HLC can also confirm the alterations. She has lived next door to the Watchhill house on the agenda for over 50 years. Knew all the people in the house. Her email is [REDACTED] Her phone number is [REDACTED]

When we first got the notice in August she sent in her protest along with her statements of the alterations. Like I did when I got the second notice it was on the agenda I called your office and was assured that the information I sent in previously was going forward with this application. Mrs Hardin told me she called your office two weeks ago when she got her second notice and was likewise assured her previous information would not need to be sent in. Neither of our comments were sent to the HLC in the packet. Only Mrs Hasty's comments in favor were sent to the HLC and she has only lived in Old Enfield 5 years.

Rob Rickards who made the alterations lives in Southwest Austin.

Regarding the "only" \$8,500 in tax abatement I am shocked. A City of Austin historically designated house behind me that faces Lorrain made \$50,000 NON historic improvements per the city permit to their historically zoned house that you administratively approved without any comment from the public. Zero. None. They are getting tax abatement on the \$50,000 NON historic addition plus historic tax abatement on a non historic swimming pool.

The long historically designated house on West Lynn owned for a long time by Dr Fox is almost doubling the size of the historic house with non historic additions. I assume with your approval. We the taxpayers are going to pick up the tax abatement on those huge NON historic additions.

The McWilliams on Niles were able with HLC approval to build a huge non historic wall costing \$75,000 that blocks the view of the historic house from the street. Not only do they get tax abatement on the non historic wall but the public now has no view of the historic house As one AISD school board member stated the public should at least get a view of the historic house if we are going to give tax abatement

As I watch the HLC on television over and over again I see huge non historic additions approved on historic structures and historically designated buildings downtown and yet never do I hear the staff mention the cost to Austin taxpayers or the fact that the owner is getting historic tax abatement on the huge NON historic additions.

I support historic zoning but I don't approve huge historic tax abatements given to NON historic additions.

-----Original Message-----

From: Sadowsky, Steve <Steve.Sadowsky@austintexas.gov>
To: Guernsey, Greg <Greg.Guernsey@austintexas.gov>; JC <jmchri@aol.com>
Sent: Mon, Sep 28, 2015 8:29 am
Subject: RE: Shocked By Staff Recommendation on Watchhill House

Hi Jim:

I am checking on the alterations. As for the tax breaks, all the taxing entities have instituted caps on the amount of the tax exemption for new residential applications for historic zoning. The maximum tax break in this case is \$8,500, which is the total for all of the taxing entities – City, County, and AISD.

*Steve Sadowsky
Historic Preservation Officer
City of Austin, Texas
974-6454*

From: Guernsey, Greg
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2015 7:53 AM
To: JC
Subject: Re: Shocked By Staff Recommendation on Watchhill House

Hi Jim: I'm out town and will not be back in the office until Thursday. However, I will check with Steve today on this matter. Greg

Sent from my iPhone

On Sep 25, 2015, at 8:06 PM, JC <jmchri@aol.com> wrote:

Greg

As you know I am a supporter of historic zoning if a house is truly historic and not altered. Needless to say I was shocked today to read on the agenda for the Historic Landmark Commission on Monday a million dollar house at 1606 Watchhill being recommended for historic zoning. Huge tax abatements would be awarded if this house is zoned historic. This house is in my Old Enfield neighborhood and the 92 year old neighbor to this house had written HLC staff to tell them of the alteration.

This house has been greatly altered in the last 15 years and should not be considered historic. The pillars presently in front of the house were added. A porch that went the full length of the house along the second story is no longer there.

I am more shocked that my letter to the commission in August 2015 which pointed out these alternations was not included in the package.

Jim Christianson

See staff recommendation below and my letter to the HLC on August 12, 2015 that was not included in the packet to the HLC members.

Agenda

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=239614>

Backup

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=239616>

-----Original Message-----

From: JC <jmchri@aol.com>

To: steve.sadowsky <steve.sadowsky@austintexas.gov>

Sent: Wed, Aug 12, 2015 2:29 pm

Subject: 1606 Watchill Road

Members of the City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission
City of Austin
Austin, Texas

Dear Honorable Members

I have never NOT supported historic zoning for houses in my neighborhood of Old Enfield. That is until this case at 1606 Watchill Road. I have lived in this neighborhood for 25 years so I know all the historic houses or houses that should be designated historic in Old Enfield. Yes we have many that should be zoned historic but as you know it is very difficult to do if an owner objects and these houses would have owner objection. I also served 22 years on your same board the City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission. The last 6 of those years I served as Chairman.

I don't know what your staff report will say but this house does not look today what it looked like say 15 years ago. The pillars were not on the original house. The upper porch area has been removed. The owners known as the Rob Rickards made major alterations to the exterior 15 years ago. They put in the pillars.

Regarding historic people associated with the house its most celebrated history has been in most recent years when the owners were the Ken Barfields. According to news reports he stole over a million dollars from the David Dewhurst campaign where he was a trusted aide. Every neighborhood needs a scandal or two and we certainly have had our share of scandalous people in Old Enfield. It is part of our history. When I moved here 25 years ago the house was owned by the Grays. Mrs Gray was connected to the Belmont family for which Belmont Hall at UT is named I believe she was the daughter of Theo Belmont. But her father

never lived in the house. They would not recognize the house today.

It is a pretty house but it is not the same house it was 15 years ago.

Sincerely

Jim Christianson
1520 Windsor
Austin, Texas

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