

1/10/2016

To:     Tori Haase  
          Planning and Zoning Department  
          City of Austin

From: The Owners of Modern Eyes  
       (Dr Sonja Franklin & Mark Lind)  
       2222 Rio Grande, Suite 180

Case: C14-91-0038(RCA)

Dear Members of the City Council and Planning Commission—

As nearby property owners, we have received notification that another historic building in our area is under consider for relocation. Please consider our comments as you make your decision.

This will be the second notification we have received in less than a year. While we are not opposed to Austin's growth, nor opposed to new development, we are concerned about its impact on Austin's cultural heritage. And that is what is at stake.

These are not just old buildings that happen to be in the way of new construction; these are important elements in Austin's cultural heritage. That is why they were awarded the protections given to historic structures, after having gone through a rigorous historical review process.

As an architecture student who was fortunate enough to spend a semester studying in Europe, my husband was able to see firsthand how they manage to not only allow for growth, but to do so in a manner that allows for the protection of their older buildings. In fact, what occurs regularly in Europe and many older countries around the world, is a happy coexistence between old and new. Older buildings are not just either destroyed or relocated. Rather they are built upon and around and integrated within new buildings, rather than being leveled or displaced. We find that strategy to be more acceptable to removing historic structures from their original sites, and suggest that this is an alternative strategy that should be considered in cases where new projects are proposed on property already occupied by existing historic structures.

Another strategy that should be considered, would be to create an Historic District within which historic structures could be relocated to sit beside one another on a street that preserves the urban scale as well as the buildings! Quite frankly, you must admit that it is difficult to separate a historic structure from its context. Buildings are as much a part of their place as they are of their time. Rather than remove a structure from its original site, and relegate it to some remote corner of another neighborhood where it is unlikely to be appreciated or perhaps even seen, would it not be better to group similar historic structures together so that the streetscape of that era can be preserved? After all, that is what is truly historic : a sense of the scale and urban quality that these buildings made up, not just the buildings themselves !!

Unfortunately, the system that is currently in place now— where the relocation of historic structures is considered independently, on a case by case basis— seems to be flawed in that it allows for the protection of individual structures without recognizing the importance of their context. Despite the best efforts of many, that system now seems to be failing to protect historic structures in the manner that we believe was originally intended. If an historic plaque on a building is to have any real meaning, then it should not be an easy thing to move it from its site without considering its overall urban context or the historic significance of its original location.

We respectfully request that a moratorium upon any further removal and relocations of historic structures be immediately enacted, until a truly equitable and comprehensive plan is developed—one that will preserve Austin’s dwindling cultural legacy and live up to the promise of protection that was given to these buildings when their plaques were originally installed.

Thank you,

Dr Sonja Franklin  
Mr. Mark Lind