



ARTS COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20201019.5.a

Date: 10-19-20

Subject: Arts Commission Recommendation on the African-American Cultural Heritage District Revitalization and Cultural Historical Development

Motion By: Commissioner Lulu Flores

Seconded By: Commissioner Michelle Polgar

Recommendation

The Arts Commission requests that City Council reaffirm its designation of the African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD) and commit to revitalization of the District through development and investment in historic, cultural and preservation projects, including the preservation and designation of the remaining two parcels of Urban Renewal Property (Lots 16 and 18 at the 1100 Block on East 11th Street) as cultural heritage property to be developed instead as cultural arts and music facilities that support the African American community and reflect their cultural heritage. Additionally, Council should direct City Manager and appropriate City Departments to make recommendations for such redevelopment and investment by developing a plan in coordination with the AACHD Investment Initiative and other private and public strategic partners. .

Description of Recommendation to Council

The Arts Commission, in support of the African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD) Investment Initiative, recommends that City Council commit to the development of the remaining properties in historic East Black Austin within the boundaries of the AACHD in ways that address and preserve Black culture and that benefit the entire Austin community by creating a viable arts and cultural destination that drives cultural tourism and economic development in the District. This would include the dedication of Lot 16 and Lot 18 as cultural heritage property and their development as such.

Revitalization of the AACHD would include the development of historic, cultural and preservation projects, institutions/facilities and activities; encourage the return of small, minority-owned businesses; and create a vibrant street and nightlife center that reflects the African American historic legacy of the District.

City Manager would be directed to work with the various Departments to develop the necessary strategies to implement the following actions, expeditiously, and if feasible, immediately:

- Update all official city Zoning Maps that show designated Cultural and Historic Districts and Landmarks to include the African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD);
- Develop an official detailed map specifically for the District by using the East Austin Historical Survey findings to designate cultural, historic, and heritage sites and landmarks within the District; add those locations to official maps;
- Develop way-finding signage for public right-of-ways that provide directional guidance for locating the AACHD in general, and specific landmarks and significant places of interests within the District;

- Fund and implement a highly visible Place-making program within the District (signage, public art, streetscape features, AACHD-branded street signs/markers, historic neighborhood identifiers, etc.);
- Instruct Historic Preservation Department to use cultural/historic/heritage assets inventory list found in East Austin Historical Survey to initiate designation activities to establish placement on the National Registry of Historic Places;
- Instruct Historic Preservation Department to use cultural/historic/heritage assets inventory list found in East Austin Historical Survey to initiate designation of historic sub-districts throughout the AACHD to get placement on local, state, and national registers;
- Work with Economic Development Department, African-American Resource Advisory Commission, and Urban Renewal Board to craft an incentives program specifically to attract and nurture growth of professional entertainment and creative industry businesses, and culture-based organizations to locate/do business within the District;
- Empower Urban Renewal Board to actively perform their development over-sight function and strengthen incentives and restrictions that support historic and cultural preservation efforts within the District;
- Coordinate with the Cultural Arts Division, Parks and Recreation Department, Music Commission, Arts Commission, and African American Resource Advisory Commission to establish a funding mechanism specifically to support public arts and culture programming within the District;
- Instruct Economic Development to devise a mechanism to engage an East Austin Cultural Policy and Planning consultant to conduct a planning process that results in production of a strategic plan to steer sustainable development and growth of the District.

Rationale:

The African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD) Investment Initiative appeared before the Arts Commission requesting support and calling on the City of Austin to honor the 2007 initial designation of the AACHD and protect and invest in this vital center of Austin’s African American historic and cultural legacy. We believe the city has reached a critical juncture in the call to support our African American community, its history and culture, and we believe this project is an important step in meeting our long-overdue commitment.

Austin’s Urban Renewal Board was charged 20 years ago to revitalize East 11th and 12th streets by encouraging historic, cultural and preservation projects, supporting institutions, facilities and activities, encouraging the return of small, minority-owned businesses and creating a vibrant street and nightlife center reflecting the African American historic legacy of the district. At this juncture, the preservation, cultural heritage, and nightlife revitalization portion of their mission has not been implemented and only two commercial lots on East 11th street between I-35 and Navasota Street remain free from development: lots 16 and 18. Failure to protect these properties risks their demise.

The AACHD is home to significant economic, historical, cultural and heritage tourism assets, including the oldest institution of higher learning in the City, Huston-Tillotson University; the Texas State Cemetery, Evergreen Cemetery and Oakwood Cemetery; The French Legation; the Victory Grill; the historic East 11th and 12th Street African American Music and Commercial Corridors (The East End); the original Austin Public Library Building and George Washington Carver Museum; three of the City’s oldest religious congregations — the Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Metropolitan AME, and the Wesley United Methodist Church; the historic site of the City’s first and only African American-owned pharmacy; the home of famed jazz musician Kenny Dorham; the temporary home of Supreme Court

Justice Thurgood Marshall; the first federal Public Housing Project in the nation; scores of designated historically significant homes and buildings; prime examples of period architecture; and the core of the Historic African American Community of Austin.

It is imperative that the City of Austin act now to make reparations to the African American community, and prevent the complete loss and decimation of their heritage and presence in Black East Austin.

Vote 9-0

For:

Jaime Castillo – Chair
Michelle Polgar – Vice Chair
Brett Barnes
Lulu Flores
Bears Rebecca Fonte
kYmberly Keeton
Amy Mok
Celina Zisman
Rick Van Dyke

Against: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Commissioner Garza

Attest:

Anne-Marie McKaskle-Davis,
Arts Commission Staff Liaison

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AM', is written over a faint rectangular grid background.