

From: Pete Gilcrease

Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2020 11:41 AM

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Cc: Rivera, Andrew <Andrew.Rivera@austintexas.gov>; Rusthoven, Jerry <Jerry.Rusthoven@austintexas.gov>

Subject: Friends of Hyde Park Opposes Baker Center Historic Designation Rezoning

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

Historic Commission Meeting: October 26, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting: October 27, 2020

Austin City Council Meeting: November 12, 2020

Case Number: C14H-2020-0087

Project Location: 3908 Avenue B

Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council,

Friends of Hyde Park strongly opposes the rezoning of the Baker Center to include historic zoning (-H). This rezoning will remove almost all opportunities for affordable housing on the property in the future and should be strongly opposed by the Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and the City Council. The Baker Center property is already zoned within the Hyde Park Local Historic District (-HD) and there is no need to also zone the property with the further historic (-H) restriction.

Making a property historic has been known to make it hard or impossible to add housing to any part of the property, even the parking lots. Parking lots cover a considerable amount of the Baker School property and could be a great way to add affordable housing around the existing building. A previous example is the Dabney-Horne House at 507 W 23rd from [February 23, 2014](#). It was zoned historic and the property owners wanted to add additional housing on the parking lot next to the historic zoned house and it was rejected. These types of barriers to housing and large parking lots are unnecessary and harm affordability and alternative transportation options in Austin.

When the Alamo Draffhouse was originally purchasing the property [in 2018, Friends of Hyde Park was very concerned](#) that Alamo had no intention of ever building any housing on the property, which was a requirement for them in order to qualify for the purchase of the property from AISD. We were concerned that Alamo only included the designs for additional and affordable housing in their proposal as a way to purchase the property under market value from AISD so Alamo could use the property solely for their headquarters. Our concerns were based on two meetings Friends of Hyde Park had with the architect for the project. Their proposal was hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars lower than what AISD could have otherwise received from another buyer, which deprived our schools, teachers, and children of much needed revenue and [led to a lawsuit](#) for AISD not disclosing how they selected their preferred bid and if favoritism had anything to do with the bid selection process.

Friends of Hyde Park was right about Alamo not adding affordable housing to this site like they promised the community in 2018, since none has been added and there are no plans to add any. Friends of Hyde Park is now concerned that this zoning request could be a short-term strategy to increase the value of the land before a potential sale of the property since [Alamo is having financial troubles](#) due to COVID-

19. Additionally, a historic designation on the property would dramatically reduce the amount of property taxes that Alamo would pay yearly. The Historic Commission, Planning Commission, and City Council should reject zoning decisions that could simply be to benefit this property owner financially in the short term and instead should be considering the long term impacts of this rezoning to Austin and the potential future affordable housing lost.

Friends of Hyde Park is already very concerned with the amount of complex zoning restrictions that were previously placed on the Baker Center land when the Planning Commission and City Council rezoned the property in 2018 to be part of the Neighborhood Conservation Combining District (NCCD), which Friends of Hyde Park opposed. These extreme zoning restrictions already place a large burden on the amount of housing and affordable housing that could be built on site. Adding historic zoning on top of all of the other restrictions will be a huge loss to our neighborhood and Austin as a source for future affordable housing. If affordable housing is something that our city values, this zoning request will be soundly rejected.

Friends of Hyde Park membership previously voted on the Baker Center. **101 members voted and 86% of those that voted approved** of the “site to be developed to allow the maximum amount of housing and/or walkable neighborhood amenities that would benefit the neighborhood. If residential use is included, options should include affordable housing units.” The majority view on what should be allowed on this site is not being taken into account with the proposed historic zoning.

Information About Friends of Hyde Park

Friends of Hyde Park is currently the largest neighborhood association in our neighborhood with over 500 current members (approximately 50% renters and 50% homestead homeowners). Friends of Hyde Park advocates for more affordable housing and a more walkable, bikeable, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and transit friendly neighborhood.

Contact:

Board of Directors of Friends of Hyde Park

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