

ZONING CHANGE REVIEW SHEET

CASE NUMBER: C14H-2020-0087

HLC DATE:

11/16/2020

PC DATE:

11/24/2020

APPLICANT: Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas Baker LLC

HISTORIC NAME: Baker School

WATERSHED: Waller Creek

Council District: 9

ADDRESS OF PROPOSED ZONING CHANGE: 3908 Avenue B

ZONING FROM: GR-HD-NCCP-NP to GR-HD-H-NCCD-NP

SUMMARY STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the proposed zoning change to designate the former Baker School as a historic landmark with reduced boundaries to include the school building and its frontage to the street with a buffer on the north, south, and west of the building. The applicant has offered a similar proposal for a reduced zoning area that includes more property than staff recommends.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION:

Historical significance and community value.

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION ACTION: **October 26, 2020:** Postponed to November 16, 2020. **November 16, 2020:** Recommended historic zoning for the entire site. Vote: 10-1-1- (Papavasiliou opposed; Wright recused).

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION: Recommended historic zoning for a limited parcel in accordance with staff recommendation. Vote: 8-0 (Flores, Shaw, and Shieh absent; Seeger off-dais).

DEPARTMENT COMMENTS: The former Baker School is contributing to the Hyde Park Local Historic District.

CITY COUNCIL DATE: December 10, 2020

ACTION:

ORDINANCE READINGS: 1ST 2ND 3RD

ORDINANCE NUMBER:

CASE MANAGER: Steve Sadowsky

PHONE: 974-6454

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION:

Austin Independent School District, Austin Lost and Found Pets, Austin Neighborhoods Council, Bike Austin, Central Austin Community Development Corporation, Central Austin Urbanists, Friends of Austin Neighborhoods, Friends of Hyde Park, Homeless Neighborhood Association, Hyde Park Neighborhood Assn., Hyde Park Neighborhood Plan Contact Team, My Guadalupe, Neighborhood Empowerment Foundation, North Austin Neighborhood Alliance, Preservation Austin, SELTexas, Sierra Club, Austin Regional Group

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

Architecture:

While City Code does not allow a contributing building within a local historic district to be designated as a historic landmark for its architectural significance, the former Baker School is worthy of an architectural description as it reflects the work of three of the most prominent architects in Austin in the early- to mid-20th century. Built in 1911, the building is a raised two-story institutional building with a raised full basement. The building is constructed of Austin Common buff brick with poured concrete accents. The building has bands of five 2:2 windows with transoms in the principal block (these, while believed to be of historic age, are not original); the raised basement level also features bands of five 2:2 windows, but without transoms. The principal entry faces Avenue B, and has a brick portico that once had Doric columns and arched sides; the portico frames the raised and recessed entry, which features a double set of glazed wood doors. The portico has a small gablet at its center, echoing the gablet on the top of the building which has the inscription “Baker School.” Additional decorative aspects of the building include concrete bracket-like moldings in the at the top of the pilasters defining the bays, and a prominent cornice.

At the north and south ends of the original 1911 building are rectangular-shaped additions matching the height and configuration of the original block. These additions project proud of the main block of the building, and have a pair of 2:2 windows on each floor, all without transoms.

The solid appearance of the building hearkens to the Neo-Classical architecture popular for commercial and institutional buildings in the early 20th century. The hallmarks of Neo-classical architecture are a grand scale, use of simple geometric forms, and classical ornamental details, all a reaction to the perceived frivolity of the Queen Anne and other Victorian-era architectural styles. This imposing building constructed of brick and concrete, replacing an older wood building, lends an air of permanency to the mission of education in Austin.

The original school building was designed by prominent local architect Roy Thomas, who also designed a 1958 addition to the rear of the building. Hugo Kuehne, a well-known and prolific local architect, designed the additions to the north and south ends of the original building in 1924. There is also a 1939 addition designed by noted local architects Kreisle and Brooks. There are two associated buildings on the northwest corner of the site: one built before 1940 to house a boiler, and the band room, constructed in 1958.

The current owners are painstakingly restoring and rehabilitating the original interior finishes and materials as part of their preservation and restoration of the historic building.

Historical Associations:

Baker School is one of the oldest school buildings in the city and exemplifies the important role that public schools played in Austin’s history. Located in the Hyde Park neighborhood, developed in 1891 by Monroe Shipe as the city’s first streetcar suburb, and designed to appeal to the upper middle class, Baker School was an essential feature in the new residential district.

Baker School replaced the older Hyde Park School established by Monroe Shipe, which was located on Speedway, when the older school proved inadequate for the rising population in the neighborhood. It was named for DeWitt Clinton Baker (1832-1881), who helped establish Austin’s public school system, serving as the inspector of schools from 1872 to 1877, and as treasurer of the Austin Library Association, organized Austin’s first public library. A

businessman and a native of Portland, Maine, Baker also wrote several books on Texas history.

Baker School began as an elementary school for the children of Hyde Park, then became a middle school in 1973, and finally a high school (W.R. Robbins) in 1980. Baker was a neighborhood school for students in Hyde Park, and was renowned for quality education and an outstanding music program. The Austin Independent School District used the building for administrative offices before selling the property in 2019 to the owners of the Alamo Drafthouse, a national chain of movie theaters, which intends to use the building as their corporate offices.

Community Value:

Baker School exemplifies neighborhood schools in Austin at the turn of the 20th century, and the development of Austin's public school system. As a neighborhood landmark, Baker School has served as a focal point for social, educational, and cultural activities in the community.

Austin, like most Southern cities, lagged behind the rest of the country in developing a public school system in the late 19th century. While older communities on the Eastern seaboard had strong traditions of public education by the second half of the 19th century, most communities in Texas depended on tutors, subscription (private) schools, and churches to provide educational instruction for children. The Texas Constitution of 1876 provided for the Permanent School Fund, designed to provide revenue to public schools throughout the state. Austin established a school trustees board around the same time, and the first truly public school opened in Austin in 1882. There were other schools in the city already at that time, including some in African-American freedmen's settlements, but none employed public tax funds for their operation. Texas enacted its Compulsory Education Law in 1915, requiring all school-age children to attend school for at least a portion of every year. Baker School predates the Compulsory Education Law of 1915, which was responsible for a flurry of school building, including Mathews Elementary in West Austin, a historic landmark. The importance of public education reflects the transition of Austin from a frontier city to a city of culture with a literate population.

The appeal and success of Hyde Park as an upper middle class residential district depended upon the establishment of social, cultural, religious, and educational institutions for residents. The founders of Hyde Park recognized this, constructing the wood-frame Hyde Park School soon after the establishment of the neighborhood. Baker School reflects the continuing growth of Hyde Park and the need for a larger educational institution for the residents of the neighborhood. As one of the oldest school buildings remaining in Austin, it is remarkably intact and satisfies the Community Value criterion for its place in the overall image of Austin and for the Hyde Park neighborhood in particular.

PARCEL NO.: 0219050303

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Lot 78, Hyde Park Addition No. 2

ESTIMATED ANNUAL TAX ABATEMENT: \$62,290. Total estimated tax liability before abatement: \$268,291

APPRAISED VALUE: \$11,841,067

PRESENT USE: Under renovation

CONDITION: Excellent

PRESENT OWNERS:

Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas Baker, LLC
3908 Avenue B
Austin, Texas 78751

DATE BUILT: ca. 1911

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS: Additions in 1924, 1939, and 1958 as described above.

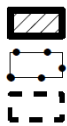
ORIGINAL OWNER(S): Austin Independent School District

OTHER HISTORICAL DESIGNATIONS: Contributing to the Hyde Park Historic District



Photo from KUT post on the sale of the school.

LOCATION MAP



SUBJECT TRACT

PENDING CASE

ZONING BOUNDARY

NOTIFICATIONS

CASE#: C14H-2020-0087

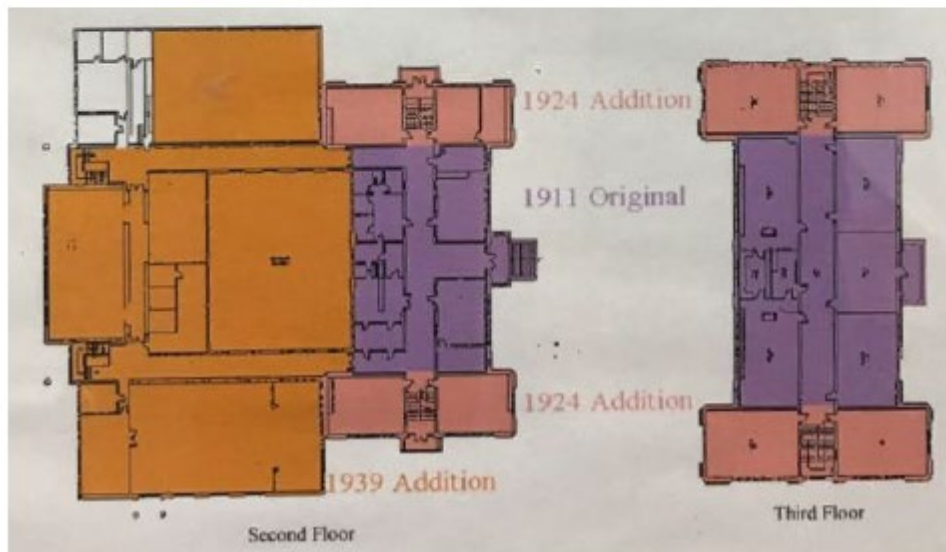
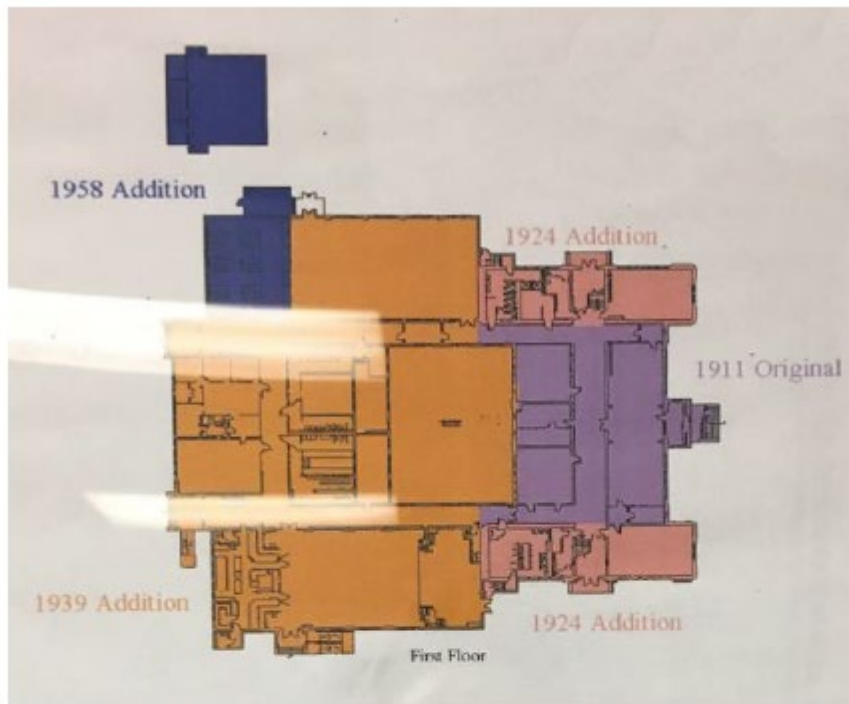
LOCATION: 3908 AVENUE B



1" = 333'

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ORIGINAL BAKER SCHOOL COMPLETED 1911 (SOUTHEAST ELEVATION)

Note: the entry shown in this photograph has been modified, but this photo shows the original design intent of Neo-Classical architecture with the columned and arcaded front portico. Also of note are the multi-light windows that have since been replaced.



ORIGINAL CLASSROOM SHOWING CHALKBOARDS, TRIM, DOORS AND TRANSOM