

January 22, 2021

Historic Landmark Commission and Austin Historic Preservation

Re: Proposed Demolition of Old Enfield home at 1517 Murray Lane

Dear Commission Members and Staff,

As neighbors and homeowners in the Old Enfield neighborhood, we are writing to make you aware that we are strongly opposed to, and extremely distressed at the prospect of, the demolition of the 1920s contributing home at 1517 Murray Lane. Old Enfield remains a grand example of Austin's history and nothing speaks to that history more than the homes themselves. 1517 Murray Lane is one of those homes. *Importantly, it is a contributing house in the Old West Austin National Register Historic District.*

Though not all of our homes have been assigned official historic designation, Old Enfield is rich with history. 1517 Murray Lane was built by W. H. Morley, a life-long resident of Austin who operated Austin's first and oldest pharmacy. His father had opened the drug store in downtown Austin in 1874, and Morley took over the pharmacy in 1920. Austin's revered writer William Sydney Porter (O'Henry) had worked in the pharmacy in the late 19th century as a pharmacist assistant (some of O'Henry's work reflects his days as a pharmacist, including the story "The Love Philtre of Ikey Shoenstein"). The retail store featured Austin's first soda fountain, and the Statesman reports that "it was here that the elite of the town gathered in the early days before Congress Avenue became the center of business activities." W.H. Morley oversaw the expansion of the pharmacy as it became a modern drug store and a wholesale drug manufacturer. He operated the business for decades. When he built his home on Murray Lane, he used part of the home for his pharmaceutical business. The Morley pharmacy operated in Austin for over a century (first as Morley Brothers, later as Grove Pharmacy. W.H. Morley's family lived at 1517 Murray for over 30 years, until their deaths. The connection of this property to a prominent Austinite and an iconic business warrants historic designation.



MORLEY BROTHERS DRUG STORE

(c. 1871)

Morley Brothers Drug Store located here and in other buildings on East 6th Street as early as 1874. Originally a two-story structure, expanded in 1906 to three stories with large imported, Queen Anne style copper-clad window frames brought to Austin by rail.

Morley Brothers Drug Store, later Grove Drugs, operated here from 1906 to 1986; sold patented medicines such as "German Sarsaparilla," "Marvelous Mexican Medicines," "Lemon Chill Cure," and "Wonderful Eight" (which allegedly cured all pain).

The Cactus Line Products Company (located upstairs) was known as "the drug manufacturing center of Texas" in the early 1900s. O. Henry was employed by the Morleys as a pharmacist's assistant in 1894.

This is what the pharmacy looked like around the time Morley built his home on Murray Lane:



Apart from its important occupants, the Morley house contributes significantly to the aesthetics and feel of Old Enfield. It is a charming property, with a distinctive “eyebrow” design reflected in its upstairs windows. Removing contributing structures such as this one, will begin to dilute the historic character and significance of all of Old Enfield, particularly if this were to become a pattern. No doubt there are other neighborhoods where tear downs, replaced with McMansions, are appropriate. Old Enfield is not one of those. Moreover, the proposed design of the new structure is completely out of sync with the aesthetics of the immediate surroundings. 1517 Murray is one of several quaint historic homes of similar scale on Murray Lane. The proposed modern “Australian Terrace House” design would be a jarring next to the bungalows and historic properties adjacent to it and would detract significantly from the cohesive quality of the homes found in Old Enfield. After a respectful appeal to the new owners themselves (see attached), we’ve sadly seen no willingness by them to back off from the demolition path and the proposed replacement structure, which maximizes lot size and space with a ultra-modern box structure, is not at all consistent with the surrounding homes.

The standard for review – that properties within historic districts shall retain and preserve the historic character – counsels against permitting demolition of 1517 Murray Lane. We welcome the opportunity to provide additional input. Probably nothing could make our case better than to have you to take a slow drive through Old Enfield. Even better, take a walk with us! Possibly then you would have a better understanding of what attracted each of us to make our home here and, in some way, become stewards for what the original residents put in place.

This statement is presented for your consideration by nearby neighbors and homeowners in Old Enfield, all residing within 500 ft of 1517 Murray Lane.

Sincerely,

Robyn & Roy Leamon 1513 Murray Ln.
Lori Holleran & Jordan Steiker 1515 Murray Ln.
Rick Russell & Kathleen Smith 1519 Murray Ln
Bill Attal 1511 Murray Ln.
Glenda Flanagan 1509 Murray Ln.
Clara Heironimus & Bob Kelly 1502 Murray Ln
Ellie Hutcheson 1504 Murray Ln.
Becky & Dennard Gilpin 1503 Murray Ln.
Ed Blaine 1507 West Lynn
Sheila Fleming 1500 West Lynn
Gabrielle Sheshunoff & Rudolf Bekink 1710 Windsor Rd
Lil and Wally Loewenbaum 1708 Windsor Rd

Dear Josh and Jackie,

It is the consensus of those of us living on Murray Lane that you purchased a truly beautiful home, one of the more unique houses in all of Old Enfield. So congratulations are in order! We want to welcome you as our newest neighbor.

We thought it only fair to be up front with you about how those of us living on Murray Lane, and nearby homes, feel about current plans to demolish the house and proceed with the proposed new design and construction. In short, we are all in opposition to any plan where demo of the existing structure is the starting point. Our hope is that you will reconsider and further explore ways in which you can accomplish your goals while leaving the home's street face essentially intact, as it has been since the 1920s.

Historic significance is currently being taken up by the Historic Landmark Commission. Setting that aside, we have a strong desire to keep the look and feel that first attracted each of us to Murray Lane. As you know, it's a short street, with homes of appropriate scale to lot size and street configuration. Several of us have managed to upgrade, add on and even modernize significant portions of our homes, without losing the all important street facades and footprints which contribute to the charm and sense of history we treasure. We know that Bob and Suzanne were proud to live in a historically significant neighborhood and prominently displayed their plaque beside the front door entrance.

Jackie and Josh – we look forward to getting to know you both better as permanent residents of Murray Lane. For reasons outlined above, please consider an alternate approach, one where demolition of the existing house doesn't happen. It's meaningful for us all.

Sincerely,

Your Murray Lane Neighbors:

Robyn & Roy Leamon 1513 Murray Ln.

Lori Holleran & Jordan Steiker 1515 Murray Ln.

Rick Russell & Kathleen Smith 1519 Murray Ln

Bill Attal 1511 Murray Ln.

Glenda Flanagan 1509 Murray Ln.

Clara Heironimus & Bob Kelly 1502 Murray Ln

Ellie Hutcheson 1504 Murray Ln.

Becky & Dennard Gilpin 1503 Murray Ln.

Ed Blaine 1507 West Lynn

Bill & Marianne Dorman 1505 West Lynn

Gabrielle Sheshunoff & Rudolf Bekink 1710 Windsor Rd

Lil and Wally Loewenbaum 1708 Windsor Rd



1500 Murray



1517 Murray



1515 Murray



1513 Murray

1513



1511 Murray



1504 Murray



1502 Murray



1519 Murray