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May 25, 2022

Terri Myers, Chair  
City of Austin  
Historic Landmark Commission

Re: 310-312 Colorado St, 201-209 W 4th St, and 211 W 4th St

Dear Ms. Myers,

Preservation Austin exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write to you today to address the alarming losses that our LGBTQIA community may face with the proposed demolitions of 310-312 Colorado St (DA-2022-040962;GF-2022-047912), 201-209 W 4th St (DA-2022-040962;GF-2022-047912), and 211 W 4th St (DA-2022-040962;GF-2022-047912). We ask the Historic Landmark Commission to reject the proposed demolitions and support historic zoning for these significant properties in the areas of Community Value and Architecture.

These cases align with Preservation Austin's Underrepresented Heritage Advocacy Priority for their associations with Austin's LGBTQIA community. Since adopting this priority, Preservation Austin's Advocacy Committee and our Fowler Family Underrepresented Heritage Interns have done extensive research into Austin's LGBTQIA heritage and the sites associated with it, many of which are no longer extant. To date, no historic landmarks, markers, or designations honor Austin's LGBTQIA heritage. This problem is not unique to Austin—scholars Camden Miller and Alex Bitterman aptly summarized this phenomenon in their essay “Commemorating Historically Significant Gay Places Across the United States”:

“Gay spaces across the United States are steeped in important and ephemeral history. However, the stories of these spaces—and the people that lived the struggle to gain LGBTQ+ rights—are largely unrecorded, undocumented, and are not centrally collected or archived beyond Wikipedia entries and oral histories. Many gay places and gay neighborhoods have no formal means of recognition or historic protection such as those that are available to other classifications of landmarks from state or federal agencies. The pioneering generation that gave rise to the LGBTQ+ rights movement is aging and the time to capture the unprecedented—and largely undocumented—history of their efforts and struggle is endangered.”

Preservation Austin remains committed to researching and protecting the spaces vital to our city's LGBTQIA heritage. We believe it is important to do so because this is a story that is not often told, but one that is essential to the complete story of Austin.

The Warehouse District has been home to a vibrant queer community for many decades, and within its walls and on its streets the very history of Austin's LGBTQIA community has been written. We heard from the Hanover company as they attempted to deny and downplay the historic associations of these buildings, while submitting their intention to assist a single bar through an undisclosed business agreement. Their good intentions ring hollow. To deny the very significant community and cultural associations of these buildings while promising to protect a single bar is to misunderstand the plight of the LGBTQIA community to have its history recognized.

Demolishing these buildings endangers the very bonds of Austin's present-day LGBTQIA community. With this proposal and the recent release of the demolition permit for the Iron Bear on 6th Street, it is clear that queer spaces in Austin are greatly imperiled. For decades, industrial districts in Austin and nationwide have fostered safe spaces for LGBTQIA communities to thrive. While other parts of Austin were (and sometimes continue to be) openly hostile to LGBTQIA individuals, these historic warehouses provided refuge. They continue to do so today, as demonstrated by the fierce community activism in opposition to this proposed demolition. We are deeply inspired by these efforts and stand in solidarity with the community to protect Austin's LGBTQIA spaces.

The Warehouse District is also a significant location of major LGBTQIA rallies for equality, protests against hate and Pride celebrations in Austin. Furthermore, demolishing even one part of this district would greatly affect the influx of tourism Austin receives during Pride, Queer Bomb, SXSW and other festivals and events that highlight our LGBTQIA community. Without this significant LGBTQIA neighborhood intact, our community would be left scrambling to maintain the same draw for tourists. Austin has something very special here that keeps visitors from around the world coming back for more. We cannot afford to lose this unique district.

The three sites proposed for demolition were identified in the [2011 Downtown Austin Plan](#) (DAP) as contributors to a potential Warehouse District (roughly between 3rd and 5th Streets and Guadalupe and Colorado). Each are examples of the industrial architecture that characterizes this district, and each contribute to the district's viability as a popular destination for entertainment downtown. Since this plan's adoption in 2011, the Warehouse District has only grown more vibrant, arguably due to the proliferation of LGBTQIA spaces.

On the need for preservation of the Warehouse District, the DAP states the following:

"The Warehouse District has become one of Austin's most popular districts and destinations, known for its unique bars, cafes and entertainment venues, all housed in 19th and early 20th century buildings with loading docks now serving as public sidewalks. The area has not been designated as an historic district, and as such, has no official protection and is at risk of being lost to new high-rise development." (p.70)

This prophecy has unfortunately come to pass. In addition to historic designation, recommendations for preserving the Warehouse District included adding a zoning overlay, implementing form-based standards for new construction, and adopting a Transfer of Development Rights program, none of which the City has acted on in the over ten years since the plan was developed. Since the plan was published, several buildings in the Warehouse District have been demolished (see below).



*Map of the potential Warehouse District from the Downtown Austin Plan (2011),  
edited to reflect the remaining contributors*

Long-term planning efforts like the Downtown Austin Plan and the forthcoming equity-based Historic Preservation Plan are written as action-oriented documents to assist City government, its staff and leadership, and its potential partners in implementing its recommendations. Significant resources go into these efforts with the understanding that they will make a difference in planning outcomes moving forward. The city must stand by the plan's recommendations, in good faith, to protect our significant buildings and landmarks in the Warehouse District and beyond.

Our city's LGBTQIA culture is inextricably tied to the historic spaces that remain in the Warehouse District. This community and its heritage have been systemically marginalized and their need for protection is urgent. We therefore implore you to protect the Warehouse District's LGBTQIA heritage and support historic zoning for 310-312 Colorado St, 201-209 W 4th St, and 211 W 4th St.

Thank you for your service to our community.

Linda Jackson, President

cc: Mayor Steve Adler, Councilmember Natasha Harper-Madison, Councilmember Vanessa Fuentes, Councilmember Sabino Renteria, Councilmember José Vela, Councilmember Ann Kitchen, Councilmember Mackenzie Kelly, Councilmember Leslie Pool, Councilmember Paige Ellis, Councilmember Kathie Tovo, Mayor Pro-Tem Alison Alter, *delivered via email*