

TO: Mayor Adler and Austin City Council Members:

My name is Harold McMillan. I am a 35+ year resident of Austin. The majority of that time I've lived in Central East Austin in the Robertson Hill Neighborhood, on Juniper St, between East 11<sup>th</sup> and East 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. I am a parent and homeowner.

My graduate education from the University of Texas was Planning and Administration (School of Social Work) and African American Cultural History (Graduate Program in American Civilization). My thesis project, admittedly completed a very long time ago, focused on the community of pre-desegregation era Black music industry folks tied to the Central East Austin music and entertainment corridors—East 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets primarily. My professional tenure in Austin has been and continues to be to engage in work to celebrate, document, preserve—where possible—and reestablish a visible and viable African American Cultural Presence in Central East Austin: no easy task given the City's history of benign neglect, redlining, displacement/removal, City-sanctioned Urban Renewal Programs and the current wave of over-heated gentrification.

In the early 2000s I drafted the initial version of the proposal to address these issues in a celebratory manner. I proposed the establishment of an African American Cultural Heritage District—cultural as in 'arts and culture' related; heritage as in 'historic preservation' related. In 2007 the District was established by Resolution. I was a founding Board Member of the organization that was set to move forward and steer building capacity to accomplish the goals laid out in the Resolution. From that time forward the organization and the City really did not do much to seriously honor, develop and invest in the District.

About 4 years ago myself and a group of veteran East Austin arts group leaders, preservationists, media and education folks took up the cause to attempt once again to get the City to acknowledge the neglect and support our African American Cultural Heritage District Investment Initiative. Finally in September 2021, this effort resulted in passage by Council of a Resolution that pledged to re-energize the City's commitment to make good on unfulfilled promises of the past. By and large, it was our group who authored that Resolution. And we are encouraged by the action of this Council, as well as the dedication of the current Urban Renewal Board to support our movement toward (re) establishing a vibrant and fully-functional, nationally-significant Cultural Heritage District.

With this information as background, I am writing to support the amendments proposed for the Urban Renewal Plan and NCCD zoning changes. For the most part I do feel that most of the folks in Robertson Hill support the amendments, as they might relate to the District. However there is concern being voiced by some of my neighbors who follow City Hall and the Urban Renewal Board's work. They fear that the 'conditional use' amendment for cocktail lounges aims to replicate East 6<sup>th</sup> Street or Rainey. Their fear is reasoned and real. But, in our view, their microscopic focus is misplaced.

In order for us to work to establish this District legitimately/functionally, there needs to be some flexibility with land-use code that could facilitate the establishment of art, culture, and music venues. Though cocktail lounge is the City's parlance to identify some of these types of businesses, I don't think this automatically translates to 'a street full of bars' that some neighbors fear.

At first reading of these amendments, there were a vocal few that attended the Council meeting to voice their opposition. I/we actually agree with their sentiment and displeasure with noise and such adjacent to our homes.

Every concern they raised, however, are enforcement issues, not policy issues. In my mind, the City's conditional-use policy gives me—and many of my neighbors—the comfort that there is a process already in place to allow input, participation, and re-dress as needed to meet neighborhood support of such decisions one way or another.

And, because I do agree with my neighbors about not wanting a string of bars all along the street, I think it is incumbent on the City, at the various appropriate levels, to work to assure our neighbors that enforcement will become more effective and that the conditional-use policy does indeed and in fact give them the local oversight that they need and want.

## East Austin Creative Coalition

Capitol View Arts • Women in Jazz • DiverseArts Culture Works • Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Preservation District  
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If the system works, as it should, these amendments work for the community, neighborhoods, and the Cultural Heritage District.

I am available and happy to share more thoughts on these issues with you, should you care to reach out.

Best,

Harold McMillan