

To: Austin mayor, City Councilmembers, City staff
Re: Historic zoning at 2002 Scenic Drive (C141H-2022-0099)

To whom it may concern

I am writing to support historic zoning for the buildings at 2002 Scenic Drive in West Austin. The unusual early twentieth century eclectic style rock buildings and the extensive landscaping, one of the earliest such attempts in Austin, would clearly be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and State Landmark status in a world where history mattered. This rare and truly beautiful property has long been admired by the residents of West Tarrytown where I currently live and where my wife has lived for nearly 30 years. She and many other current and former neighbors regard the house as an iconic neighborhood property, and it is in fact generally representative of the small group of stone houses built in the small lakeside fishing camp subdivision from the early twentieth century.

I personally have spent a half century working with historic buildings and their archaeological remains in Austin and across Texas. I have a PhD in Anthropology from UT Austin and have conducted numerous historic surveys, excavated dozens of archaeological sites that represented historic buildings and written the histories of score of historic residents of these still standing and/or formerly extant buildings. I have been president of the Texas association of professional archaeologists (the Council of Texas Archeologists), and in that capacity, served on the Texas Historic Commission. Through my wife's family, all of whom have been extensively involved in historic preservation and the protection and study of historic structures, I was invited to serve on an architectural interiors panel for National Trust for Historic Preservation grants. And I have worked across Texas as well as neighboring states and several foreign countries. Just this past summer, I was inducted into the Ecuadorian National Academy of History for my 30-odd years of working with historic and late prehistoric sites there. My PhD dissertation, compiled in the late 1980s and early 1990s studied the well-preserved remains of an Inka city, examining its layout and various functional sectors. In that region, I have worked with several structures that were initially built in the prehistoric era and still stand today in one form or another. We have carefully studied the foundations of several long-standing buildings to better understand their ability to withstand the stressful seismic and volcanic environment of Ecuador.

With apologies for the long-winded introduction, I want to state, as I have in previous missives and statements to various commissions over the past few months in this zoning dispute, that in that half century of studying historic structures not as noted above, I have seen few examples of early twentieth-century architecture that were more deserving of preservation than the former Delisle House at 2002 Scenic Drive. This opinion is shared by other historic resource professionals in Austin, including staff at Preservation Austin, and I find it disturbing and truly disgusting that anyone would even consider demolition of such an important structure.

As capital of Texas, Austin's history is more than just fascinating, it is a mirror of the development of our state as a whole. The town's early pioneering settlers, who had to fend off Indian raids at the edges of town, were gradually outnumbered by a mid-century influx of upland south settlers, followed quickly by a flurry of European immigrants, including many Jewish families from eastern Europe. The late nineteenth century saw a new wave of western European immigrants, including Swedes, and a handful of Lebanese settlers who became important merchants in the growing community. Delisle's father Adrien was one of those late nineteenth-century immigrants, coming from France to Tennessee where he established himself as an important architect, building several large churches and large residences.

Moving to Houston around the turn of the century, his youngest son Raymond Maurice would eventually move to Austin and build the house at 2002 Scenic Drive. While we do not know the architect of record for that house, its complex design and construction style limits the possibility that Delisle himself or some local "builder" had erected it. In fact, it would have required an experienced architect to achieve such a sophisticated design. It is quite possible that Delisle's architect father may have come to Austin to help, but the style of construction is much more akin to the work of Harvey Smith in San Antonio, or to Arthur Fehr's early pre-mid-century modern career that included the design and construction of the similar rock buildings at Bastrop State Park. It is never necessary to know the name of an architect, despite what the owner's representatives have implied over and over again. The quality of unique construction and design alone would be enough for National Register significance.

The applicant's team, determined to demolish this unique building, have presented the expected one-sided case for its removal, using every tactic possible to denigrate the property's historic value, well beyond the weak and ridiculous notion that it is not historic because we do not know the architect. They have attacked the owner and builder as both a rich elite and a failed businessman, though neither characterization should have any effect on the historical value of the architecture and landscaping as such. The reality is that Delisle was much more complex than painted by the applicant's selective research. Born in Tennessee in 1889, he was listed in the 1910 US Census as an apprentice optician, still living with his father in Houston. Listed as a professional optician afterward, he continued to live with his father until around 1919. By 1920 the 30-year old son Raymond opened his own optical business in Austin, though he had not yet built the Scenic Drive house; his company, Austin Optical, was one of only three optical companies in Austin at that time. By 1939, the Austin Chamber of Commerce listed him as one of four optical companies in Austin; the map had the tag line "These are the Men whose efforts and money are pushing Austin forward"

The applicant's team had chosen at one point to represent him as a failed businessman for his investment in the unsuccessful Urnite venture in the 1920s. Neither Urnite nor his other investments have anything to do with his otherwise very successful optical business, and Delisle, as do most businessmen, knew that failures often lead to future successes as Thomas Edison, who had several failed business, well understood. I doubt if Delisle himself or the 1939 Austin Chamber of Commerce thought of him as a failed businessman. In fact, the investment may just as well reflect someone with vision, willing to take a chance on the possibility of developing new and attractive new building materials. Having apparently been responsible for some of the development in the old West Austin neighborhood, his experiments with Urnite rather reflect his concern for his second occupation, neighborhood promoter.

In any case, the large stone structure complex that he built at 2002 Scenic, with its extensive landscaping, seems to reflect the opposite of failure, and he only seems to have sold the house to the Slator family as part of his retirement. Apparently, the money he received from the house bought him a boat that he planned to spend his retirement years on. Once again, trying to twist the narrative, the applicant's team in another perspective, tried to smear "failed businessman" Delisle as an idle wealthy elite with a yacht, though this is clearly a false narrative. While Delisle certainly had money, perhaps from his father, to invest in local development (another failed business?), he continued operating the Austin Optical Company until he retired in the early 1940s. BY the late 1930s, the "failed businessman-uncaring elite" Delisle had opened two locations for his business, the only optician in Austin to do so in that era.

The applicant's team has also characterized the house's owners as racist, particularly the Slaters who bought the house from Delisle. Nothing is really known of the social and humanistic values of these families, but it is highly unlikely that the son of a French immigrant would be racist, especially at a time when American Blacks were going to France to escape the worst effect of the Jim Crow era here in the US. As for the Slaters, the evidence presented by the team regarding their involvement in the Tavern, long a favorite Austin hangout, represents the worse kind of innuendo or suggestive perspective, both effective tools of conspiracy theorists. Their accusation, denied vehemently by Slater's daughter, would not be acceptable as proof in a court of law or in any historic treatise. Yet, sadly, their obviously biased and dark characterization may have swayed some commission members. Again, all of these confusing and highly selective personal attacks on the house's owners is irrelevant to the historic character of the house. The unique structure and its landscaping speak for themselves. While it is an awful practice to accuse people of racism without clear evidence, I have to point out that if even suspected occupation by racists was a deal killer for historic properties, we would have to delist the Texas Governor's mansion and a number of other clearly important historic buildings. That is sadly our history here in Austin, but it is not clearly the case with either Delisle or Slater.

There simply isn't enough space to list all of the deceptively worded arguments made by the applicant's team, but one further statement bears mention. Several engineers hired by the applicant's team have said that the house was in bad condition and would likely have to be torn down and rebuilt in any case because of construction flaws. Not having examined the house personally, I can say that this seems suspicious since numerous other nineteenth and early twentieth century constructions still standing in Austin use similar rubble core walls and rubble fill foundations. While such construction techniques often do need special care, I have personally worked with numerous such buildings that are still standing more than a century after they were built. My wife, who has written a letter of support for the 2002 Scenic Drive House, has mentioned the century-old two story building that we have remodeled in Marfa, a project that required removal and replacement of one entire wall. Ignoring calls to demolish it, she decided it was too important to the city's history and beautifully restored the old edifice that will now stand for another century in downtown Marfa.

I can't think of another building quite like the old Delisle House at 2002 Scenic Drive still standing in Austin and cannot imagine anyone interested in the history of architecture of our city would let this unique resource be destroyed. If the applicant's arguments were actually correct, I might be more open to the possibility, but their strategy of taking a completely one-sided negative approach to the project, aided by innuendo, deception, and irrelevant asides, is simply an unacceptable justification for its destruction. At the least, I propose a complete, independent historic and architectural study of the property before its destruction since we still know so little about it. I beg the council to understand that this is an important historic structure, as I have said, one of the most unique of its era in Austin, and to do the right thing and protect it. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David O. Brown, Ph.D.

Retired historic preservation professional

Tarrytown resident


From: Lisa Gilbert
To: [Collins, Kimberly](#)
Subject: Fwd: City Council Agenda Item 46-C141H-2022-0099 - Delisle House
Date: Monday, October 24, 2022 11:01:05 AM
Attachments: [2002 Scenic Drive-1.pdf](#)

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

Hi Kimberly,
Can you please add the email below to the back up materials for the City Council Meeting 10/27, Item 46, C141H-2022-0099 - Delisle House?
Thank you!
Lisa

Lisa Gilbert


Begin forwarded message:

From: Lisa Gilbert < >
Subject: City Council Agenda Item 46-C141H-2022-0099 - Delisle House
Date: October 24, 2022 at 10:50:04 AM CDT
To: Steve.Adler@austintexas.gov

Dear Mayor Adler,

I am writing you concerning Agenda item #46 on the 10/27 City Council Meeting. This is Item 46-C141H-2022-0099 - Delisle House and I ask that you vote in favor of changing the zoning of this property from SF-3-NP, family residence-neighborhood plan to SF-3-H-NP, family residence-historic landmark -neighborhood plan.

I live across the street from this home and unlike the lawyer for the owners of this property, I am part of my Tarrytown neighborhood and this home adds context and character to this community.

My home was originally a fishing cabin built about the same time as the Delisle house. The corner of Scenic Drive and Stevenson Avenue has six of these old fishing cabins/stone houses remaining. Most have been modified like this home, but all have keep a portion of the stone cabins intact.

If the previous family, who owned this property for 50 plus years had applied for Historic Landmark Status they surely would have received it with no questions asked.

I understand why the new owners purchased the property, it has a beautiful view. But, the unique stone carvings both inside and out are truly special along with two interesting buildings could make this property one of the first "keep Austin Weird" houses. The Delisle house was built before there was a road to reach it! The front of the house is to the river because that is how you had to arrive to it when it was built. This house helps to keep our neighborhood feel like old Austin. Please see the attached pdf to view some of the unique carvings.

The owners lawyers have played the “racist card” stating because the previous owners were racist (this is disputed by the previous owners daughter) and this is why this home should not be preserved. Unfortunately, this argument swayed several votes during the Planning Commissions Meeting. This brings up a hard and difficult discussion. Do we preserve buildings because of the inhabitants or do we preserve them for their beauty and design/time period when built along with the good & bad history?

If as a society we decide not to preserve buildings in Texas who at some point housed people who were/are racist we would need to start with pulling down the State Capital, the Governor’s Mansion and half of the University of Texas. I think in these cases and many more we as a community have decided that history both good and bad is made by people, not the building.

My other concern is our city’s need to compensate for past racist misdeeds the older homes of East Austin are considered more important to save than older homes in West Austin. Which says to me that my neighborhood character and history doesn’t matter. Another large modern house will only scream we have money, while the entire community will lose a bit of Austin’s history and character.

I hope you will follow the Austin Historic Commissions unanimous vote in favor along with the Planning Commissions 6-3 in favor of preserving this home for all of Austin.

Thank you for your time.

Best Regards,

Lisa Gilbert


Austin, TX 78703

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From: Lisa Gilbert
To: [Collins, Kimberly](#)
Subject: Fwd: Historic Zoning for 2002 Scenic Drive C14H-2022-0099
Date: Monday, October 24, 2022 9:53:19 AM

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

Hi Kimberly-



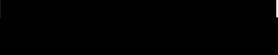
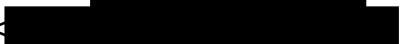
Can you please add this letter in favor of historic preservation into the back up information for the City Council Meeting on 10/27, Item 46-C141H-2022-0099 - Delisle House ?

Thank you for your help.

Lisa


Lisa Gilbert


Begin forwarded message:

From: <.com>
Subject: FW: Historic Zoning for 2002 Scenic Drive C14H-2022-0099
Date: September 26, 2022 at 5:43:18 PM CDT
To: "Lisa Gilbert" 
Cc: "Phil Gilbert" 
Reply-To: <

Thanks for the case number

Derek Barcinski
ATLANTIS ARCHITECTS
4117 Guadalupe Street
Austin Texas 78751
512 452 - 7800

From: 
Sent: Monday, September 26, 2022 5:41 PM
To: 'bc-Robert.Schneider@austintexas.gov' <bc-Robert.Schneider@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-todd.shaw@austintexas.gov' <bc-todd.shaw@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Patrick.Howard@austintexas.gov' <bc-Patrick.Howard@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Solveij.Praxis@austintexas.gov' <bc-Solveij.Praxis@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Grayson.Cox@austintexas.gov' <bc-Grayson.Cox@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Jennifer.Mushtaler@austintexas.gov' <bc-Jennifer.Mushtaler@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-

Carmen.Llanes@austintexas.gov <bc-Carmen.Llanes@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Jessica.Cohen@austintexas.gov' <bc-Jessica.Cohen@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Yvette.Flores@austintexas.gov' <bc-Yvette.Flores@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Awais.Azhar@austintexas.gov' <bc-Awais.Azhar@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Greg.Anderson@austintexas.gov' <bc-Greg.Anderson@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-James.Shieh@austintexas.gov' <bc-James.Shieh@austintexas.gov>; 'bc-Arati.Singh@austintexas.gov' <bc-Arati.Singh@austintexas.gov>; 'Andrew.Rivera@austintexas.gov' <Andrew.Rivera@austintexas.gov>
Cc: 'Alison.Alter@austintexas.gov' <Alison.Alter@austintexas.gov>; 'Natasha.Madison@austintexas.gov' <Natasha.Madison@austintexas.gov>; 'Vanessa.Fuentes@austintexas.gov' <Vanessa.Fuentes@austintexas.gov>; 'Sabino.Renteria@austintexas.gov' <Sabino.Renteria@austintexas.gov>; 'Mackenzie.Kelly@austintexas.gov' <Mackenzie.Kelly@austintexas.gov>; 'Leslie.Pool@austintexas.gov' <Leslie.Pool@austintexas.gov>; 'Kathie.Tovo@austintexas.gov' <Kathie.Tovo@austintexas.gov>; 'Ann.Kitchen@austintexas.gov' <Ann.Kitchen@austintexas.gov>; 'Chito.Vela@austintexas.gov' <Chito.Vela@austintexas.gov>; 'Paige.Ellis@austintexas.gov' <Paige.Ellis@austintexas.gov>; 'City.Clerk@austintexas.gov' <City.Clerk@austintexas.gov>

Subject: Historic Zoning for 2002 Scenic Drive

Dear Chairperson Shaw and Fellow Commissioners:

I am writing in favor of Historic Zoning designation for 2002 Scenic Drive.

This building and its grounds are well worn but intact examples of Austin's past that cannot be replicated or understood if the original buildings are demolished. We cannot learn from the past if it is removed.

Preservation of the past is part of what keeps Austin weird. We equally value the newest buildings and the oldest. If we choose to only value the new, we lose some of our collective values. The public review process embodied by this Commission gives the commissioners the opportunity to respect the values of community which respecting the rights of the individual.

In the case of 2002 Scenic, rehabilitation and reuse under the requirements of Historic Zoning designation becomes a win-win for owner and city alike. The resistance to rehabilitation and reuse do not make sense to me as an architect who has completed numerous remodels and adaptations of historical structures and grounds.

1. Demolition by neglect has never been allowed in Austin. To allow demolition sets a precedent which will allow any future speculator to throw away heritage and character.
2. Architects strive and dream of creating iconic and memorable architecture and the existing building certainly embodies both. Our city has the opportunity to protect, save and repurpose memory and beauty in

situ rather than in a photobook or museum. Documentation of Lost Austin is a tragic outcome when the original artifact could remain.

3. Construction (new or remodel) is expensive and building on this lot with its slope, soils and setbacks is extremely expensive. An engineer's letter advocating a cheaper way to build is not an aspiration for a City like Austin. Certainly, the owners of this lot understand the cost of developing such an important site and citing savings as design goal seems disingenuous.
4. Preserving the site configuration, the landscape and the stonework of 2002 Scenic is certainly something that this talented architect/owner team is capable of doing. Their work is well recognized, and their talent only limited by their charge from owners. Existing nonbearing stonework could be preserved and remain non-bearing. Failing structure can easily be supplemented with additional structure. Leaks and mold damage can be repaired.
5. There is a long-standing track record in Texas of preserving hand-crafted and vernacular works by the CCC and others. These are preserved as they represent a respect and admiration for local artisans and local construction materials in Texas buildings. The work of the CCC is cherished around our state, not because the designer was recognizable, but because the human care and craft was admirable. This home should be protected without concern for the deemed recognizability of the architect(s)

In the case of 2002 Scenic, preservation and Historic Zoning seems the balance of public and private values. Thank you for considering this opinion.

Derek Barcinski
ATLANTIS ARCHITECTS
4117 Guadalupe Street
Austin Texas 78751
512 452 - 7800

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On Sun, Oct 23, 2022 at 4:45 PM <[REDACTED]> wrote:

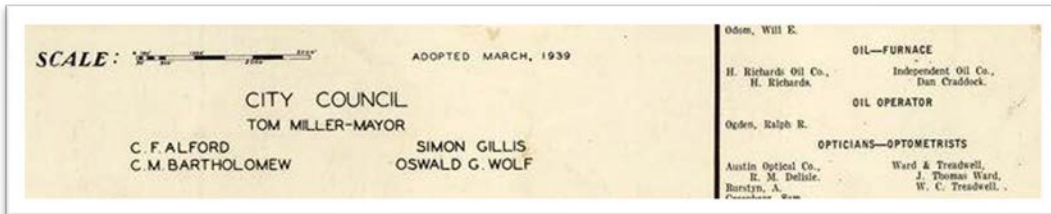
I am attaching a 1939 map of Austin, by the Roster Chamber of Commerce that lists Dr. Raymond Deslisle as one of the people "whose efforts and money are pushing Austin forward."

I can't remember if the map was included in the HLC research on 2002 Scenic.

This supports the association criteria for historic zoning.

Thanks,

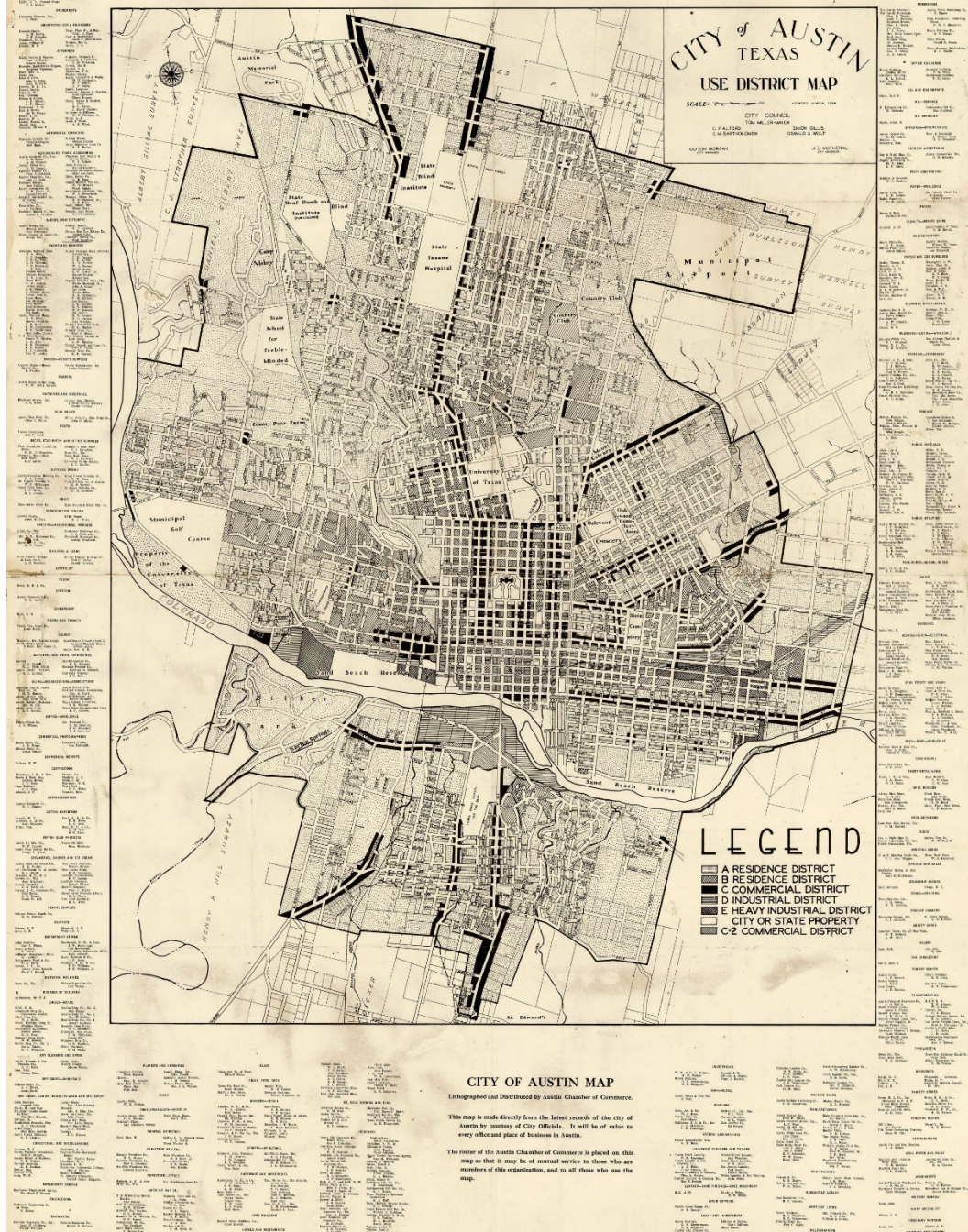
Holly



Enlarged Portion of 1939 Map indicating R. M Delisle as "Men whose money and efforts are pushing Austin forward".

ADVERTISING	
<p>Fair & Sons, Inc. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>	<p>Gray-Turner-Brown, National Co. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>
COMPANIES	
<p>Harvard and Co. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>	<p>Johnson, W. H. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>
ADVERTISING	
<p>Fair & Sons, Inc. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>	<p>Gray-Turner-Brown, National Co. 1001 E. 10th St. Minneapolis, Minn.</p>

These are the Men whose efforts and money are pushing Austin forward.



High Resolution 1939 Map

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Kimberly, could you please add the attached file to the backup information? I will refer to it when I talk about 2002 Scenic on Thursday. Thank you very much!

Mary Kahle

§ 25-2-352 - HISTORIC DESIGNATION CRITERIA.



- (A) The council may designate a structure or site as a historic landmark (H) combining district if:
- (1) the property is at least 50 years old and represents a period of significance of at least 50 years ago, unless the property is of exceptional importance as defined by National Register Bulletin 22, National Park Service (1996);
 - (2) the property retains a high degree of integrity, as defined by the National Register of Historic Places, that clearly conveys its historical significance and does not include an addition or alteration which has significantly compromised its integrity; and
 - (3) the property:
 - (a) is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places; or is designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, State Archeological Landmark, or National Historic Landmark; or
 - (b) demonstrates significance in at least two of the following categories:
 - (i) Architecture. The property embodies the distinguishing characteristics of a recognized architectural style, type, or method of construction; exemplifies technological innovation in design or construction; displays high artistic value in representing ethnic or folk art, architecture, or construction; represents a rare example of an architectural style in the city; serves as an outstanding example of the work of an architect, builder, or artisan who significantly contributed to the development of the city, state, or nation; possesses cultural, historical, or architectural value as a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian or vernacular structure; or represents an architectural curiosity or one-of-a-kind building. A property located within a local historic district is ineligible to be nominated for landmark designation under the criterion for architecture, unless it possesses exceptional significance or is representative of a separate period of significance.
 - (ii) Historical Associations. The property has long-standing significant associations with persons, groups, institutions, businesses, or events of historic importance which contributed significantly to the history of the city, state, or nation; or represents a significant portrayal of the cultural practices or the way of life of a definable group of people in a historic time.
 - (iii) Archeology. The property has, or is expected to yield, significant data concerning the human history or prehistory of the region;
 - (iv) Community Value. The property has a unique location, physical characteristic, or significant feature that contributes to the character, image, or cultural identity of the city, a neighborhood, or a particular group.
 - (v) Landscape Feature. The property is a significant natural or designed landscape or landscape feature with artistic, aesthetic, cultural, or historical value to the city.

From: Ila Falvey
To: [Collins, Kimberly](#)
Subject: IN Favor C14H-2002-0099
Date: Monday, October 24, 2022 1:47:01 PM

*** External Email - Exercise Caution ***

This property is unique and spectacular, worthy of historic designation. I urge you to take action to preserve it rather than destroy it. Unfortunately, the last discussion about this property at the Planning Commission meeting focused on the former owner of the house who was accused of being a racist (not true) rather than the merits of the architecture and uniqueness of this property and its contribution to the historic fabric of historic Austin.

Ila Falvey

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