

401 Ridgewood – Case Summary

- **The applicant asks that Historic Landmark Commission release the demolition permit for 401 Ridgewood, a 1950s house that the city indicates may be associated with Austin humorist, Cactus Pryor.**
 - The case involves a one-story ranch house at Austin’s border with Rollingwood and West Lake Hills.
 - The structure was built in 1953 and occupied by humorist and broadcaster Cactus Pryor from 1955 to 1960, which is the basis of the ‘historic association’ rationale.
- **The house’s connection to Pryor is weak, especially compared to his longtime home on Blue Ridge Trail.**
 - Pryor only lived on Ridgewood for five years, a shorter period than either of his subsequent homes – and he and his wife only had two of their four children by the time the family moved.
 - In other words, the Ridgewood house effectively served as a temporary lodging on the way to Pryor’s permanent family home on Blue Ridge Trail, where he lived for roughly four decades.
- **The house’s weak connection to Pryor arguably does not meet local and national standards for determining ‘historic association.’**
 - City code specifies that properties should have “long-standing significant associations” to qualify for the ‘historic association’ criteria – a standard that 401 Ridgewood arguably does not meet.
 - Federal guidance specifies that “each property associated with an important individual must be compared to other associated properties” to decide which best represents historic status, and that “length of association is often an important factor” – thresholds this site does not meet.
- **Pryor’s daughter agrees that the connection to Pryor is weak – and she opposes historic zoning and supports releasing the demolition permit, writing in a letter to the Historic Landmark Commission:**

“In my opinion, as Cactus Pryor’s daughter, I personally believe that if there is a ‘Cactus Pryor House’ anywhere, it would be the Blue Ridge Trail house, not the Ridgewood house... At the very least, it would seem like an odd choice to connect my father’s legacy to the Ridgewood house rather than to the places he lived and worked for most of his life.”

Figure 1. Cactus Pryor’s Homes – Historic Association Analysis

House	Pryor Occupancy	Family Associated with Home
Ridgewood	5 years	2 of 4 children
Brady Lane	7 years	4 of 4 children
Blue Ridge Trail	~40 years	4 of 4 children

Figure 2. Site

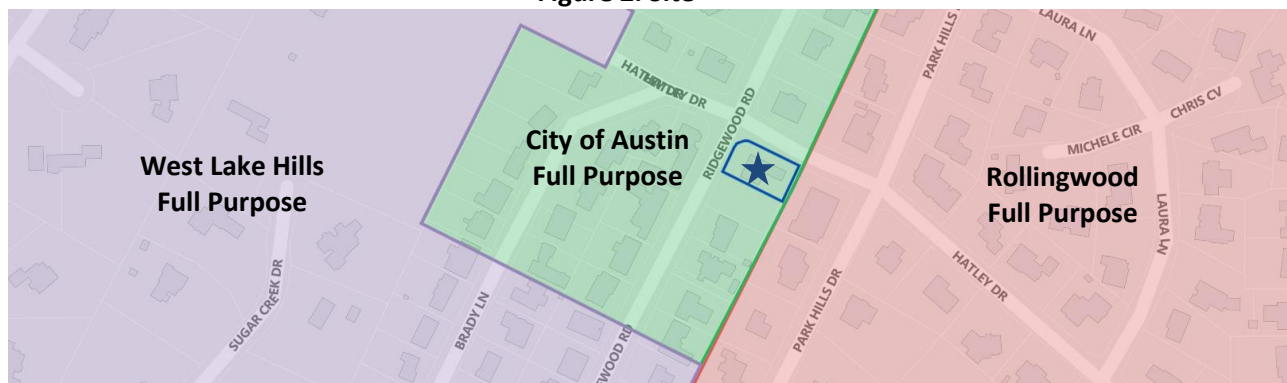


Figure 3. Structure



Figure 4. Excerpt – City of Austin Standard for Historical Associations

Section 25-2-352(A)(3)(b)(ii) of the City of Austin Land Development Code:

“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.”

Figure 5. Excerpt – Federal Standards for Criterion 2 (Association with a Person)

Criterion 2 from National Register Bulletin: How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations:

“Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.

This criterion relates to properties associated with individuals whose specific contributions to American history can be identified and documented. The person(s) associated with the property must be individually exceptionally significant within a national historic context. The association must be with the person's productive life, reflecting the time period when he or she achieved significance. Properties that pre- or post-date an individual's significant accomplishments are usually not eligible. The individual's association with the property must be documented by accepted methods of historical or archeological research.

Generally, each property associated with an important individual must be compared to other associated properties to identify the one that best represents the person's nationally historic contributions, and those comparisons must be documented. The length of association is often an important factor when assessing several properties with similar historically important associations.”

Historic Landmark Commission
301 W. 2nd Street
Austin, TX 78701

Subject: Opposing initiating historic zoning at 401 Ridgewood Rd. (PR-2023-030371)

Dear Commissioners:

It has come to my attention that the city is considering whether to initiate an historic zoning case for 401 Ridgewood, on the basis that it is associated with my father, Cactus Pryor. I am writing to you today to oppose initiating an historic zoning case and to ask that you release the demolition permit.

The city's case report states that "further research is needed to determine the Pryors' tenure in the home." I can fill in those gaps. My father lived at 401 Ridgewood from 1955 to 1960 (roughly five years), along with my mother, my older brother, and me. My two younger brothers were not born until after we moved out of the Ridgewood house.

In contrast, my father lived on Brady Lane for about seven years (1960 to 1967) and then on Blue Ridge Trail for most of the rest of his life (from 1967 until he moved to an assisted living facility in Buda, TX..

In my opinion, as Cactus Pryor's daughter, I personally believe that if there is a 'Cactus Pryor House' anywhere, it would be the Blue Ridge Trail house, not the Ridgewood house.

Our family's time in the Ridgewood house was relatively short and incomplete – two of my brothers never even lived on Ridgewood. In contrast, my father made a home for our entire family in the Blue Ridge Trail house, where he lived for four decades. At the very least, it would seem like an odd choice to connect my father's legacy to the Ridgewood house rather than to the places he lived and worked for most of his life.

To be clear: I have absolutely no financial interest or stake whatsoever in the outcome of this case. My family lived there briefly, and sold it six decades ago. I am only offering this perspective as an individual with firsthand knowledge of the facts of the case.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kerry Pryor Guthrie". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Kerry Pryor Guthrie