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January 4, 2024

RE: 812 W. Elizabeth Street Historic Zoning

Dear Chair Heimsath, Vice Chair Featherston, and Members of the Historic Landmark Commission,

[Preservation Austin](#) exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write to you today in support of historic zoning for [812 W. Elizabeth Street](#), initiated for designation at the December meeting of the Historic Landmark Commission. Built ca. 1890, this Folk Victorian home remains as one of the last vestiges of Bouldin Creek's early development. While the [staff report](#) for this case cites the home's association with the pioneering Click family, in addition to its architectural significance, the chain of renters who lived here throughout the 20th century reveals that the property likely has deeper ties with historic communities of color that should be more thoroughly understood.

Bouldin Creek, a modest neighborhood of small cottages and bungalows west of South Congress, was home to substantial Black and Mexican American communities throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Following the Civil War, many people formerly enslaved on plantations in South Austin remained in today's Bouldin Creek neighborhood. There they established the Brackenridge freedmen's community, named for the segregated school located at 319 W. Elizabeth Street, two blocks from the subject property. Following the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, Mexican immigration to Austin increased markedly. Around this time, Mexican Americans settled west of South 1st Street, anchored by two Spanish-speaking Catholic churches.

812 W. Elizabeth Street's past occupants are typical of the neighborhood's working-class history. A 1935 redlining map declared the entire area to be "Hazardous," while neighborhoods east of South Congress were labeled "Still Desirable" and "Best." This assessment was in no small part due to Bouldin's communities of color (East Austin was similarly assessed as "Hazardous" on this map). These discriminatory real estate practices kept property values accessible, making rentals common.

This diverse, working-class heritage is rapidly vanishing. Our [research](#) shows that from 2010-2021, 1309 residential demolitions occurred in the 78704 zip code where Bouldin Creek is located. Over this period, 78704 experienced the highest rate of residential demolitions of all zip codes citywide. The northeast corner of W. Elizabeth Street and Bouldin Avenue has already been diminished by the recent demolitions of homes at 816 and 814 W. Elizabeth Street, properties that have since been purchased by the owner of 812 W. Elizabeth Street.

We urge the Commission to recommend 812 W. Elizabeth Street for historic zoning and to take urgent action to protect what remains of Bouldin's working- and middle-class heritage, including that of South Austin's Black and Mexican American communities, more broadly.

Thank you for your service to our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Melissa A. Barry". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Melissa Barry, President