

August 6, 2024

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

RE: PR-2024-064274 – 1500 E 12th St

Dear Historic Landmark Commissioners,

We are writing in response to a letter dated July 2, 2024 to the Commission from Nate Jones, President of the Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods (OCEAN). This letter pertained to the above-named case regarding the property at 1500 E 12th Street, which falls within the bounds of the Davis-Thompson Neighborhood Association (DTNA). DTNA does not support OCEAN's viewpoint that the property merits historic preservation, and we do not oppose the owner's request for demolition.

In November 2023, DTNA expressed to OCEAN in a meeting that we were not opposed to demolition of this building. OCEAN did not solicit our input prior to drafting their July letter, and we were given only one day to respond to their draft; they ignored our initial feedback. This one instance is indicative of a broader pattern: OCEAN does not effectively represent the opinions or viewpoints of the neighborhoods they purportedly represent. Equitable feedback is not regularly requested from constituent neighborhood associations, and so OCEAN's "official" viewpoints do not accurately represent those of all East Austin neighborhoods.

Regarding the specifics of OCEAN's letter, we disagree that the existing building has architectural merit, which is defined as exhibiting high quality workmanship or being a quality example of a specific architectural style. Neither of these qualities is presented in the existing structure.

The building was in a dilapidated state before the current owner acquired it, and it has remained vacant for decades. One way to honor cultural heritage is to work with the developer of an older property to encourage preference or provide incentives for a culturally sensitive development that engages the East Austin community. Given that the cost to restore the building would be a significant undertaking, we believe such money would be better spent on culturally sensitive design or encouragement of minority business use in a new building.

Further, the building is also situated on the site in a way that does not meet the criteria of Austin's Great Streets Initiative. East 12th Street traffic has increased significantly over the years and will continue to increase as East Austin develops, but the existing building does not allow for safe setbacks for pedestrian use: the building appears to be less than 6 feet from the curb on 12th Street and 4 feet on Comal Street. This placement does not allow for the City of Austin required tree/landscape buffer and sidewalk. Per Great Streets guidelines, a minimum of

16 feet is required from the street. As it literally stands today, the building prevents multimodal infrastructure improvements that would enhance the streetscape for neighborhood pedestrians, bicyclists, and bus riders. Such improvements would be a far more meaningful contribution to equity on the East Side than the preservation of a non-contributing dilapidated building.

Finally, OCEAN claimed that this particular property owner is insensitive to the cultural aspects of East Austin, an opinion that may or may not be valid. Nevertheless, it is not reason enough to “punish” this developer by disallowing their request for demolition. This matter should be looked at objectively and without presumed understanding of the land owner's intent. This property may change hands again, in which case our neighborhood would be penalized by the denial of a productive use of this property that would benefit the neighborhood and East Austin at large.

We encourage you to approve the owner’s demolition request.

Sincerely,

Megan Slattery, President, DTNA
Ryan Puzycki, Acting Vice-President/Secretary, DTNA
Davis-Thompson Neighborhood Association

Attachments: DTNA Meeting Notes Google Group Message dated September 12, 2023

DTNA Meeting 9/6 @ 6pm - Notes 6 views

Megan Slattery [redacted] to DTNA AUSTIN

Sep 12, 2023, 2:33:52 PM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Thank all of you who were able to attend the DTNA meeting at Sour Duck last week. There were nine neighbors present at the meeting.

Meeting Notes:

- Parking Committee Updates (Robert Penta): No Updates. There is a window a couple times of year where the City addresses neighborhood requests for parking restrictions. There does not seem to be recent interest in addressing this from neighbors. If anyone would still like to pursue parking signage restrictions for neighborhood, please reach out to Robert or DTNA officers.
- Event Committee Updates - Fall events (Halloween/Block Party) (Kim Nguyen): Kim has volunteered to take on organizing the halloween parade/cemetery candy hunt again this year. Please reach out if you would like to help.
- Alleyway Clean-up (13th and beyond): No update
- Eureka/Gilfilan Group Update (Megan Slattery): Eureka has requested neighbor input regarding the demolition of the Ministry of Challenge building at the corner of 12th & Comal. It was noted that this building is not structurally sound and repairs are not feasible to make it occupiable, according to Eureka. All neighbors present (and one via email) agreed that there is no opposition to demolishing this building. Neighbors would, however, like to see a community oriented program on this lot if it is to be vacant for an extended period of time. It was suggested that Raasin in the Sun, and the other lots/non-profits perhaps combine efforts to activate these lots in a positive way benefitting the community. It was also suggested that Eureka continue the sidewalk around the corner on Comal, to make for better pedestrian safety. This feedback has been shared with Eureka.
- Secretary Election - Ryan Puzycki nominated: No quorum.
- Upcoming October Election: We have decided to hold elections for new leadership on the second Sunday of December. This way we will be able to get on a regular annual schedule with the term from Jan-Dec. Next year we will set quarterly meetings for overall neighborhood business, with additional meetings as needed. This schedule will be set at the December meeting. Please reach out to me or Kim if you are interested in running for a position.
- Garza HS is asking for volunteers to help water the gardens and animal care

MEGAN SLATTERY
M: 512.786.1101

[redacted] Hi All Just a heads up that there was a string of car break-ins last night on 18th and on MLK in

Sep 12, 2023, 3:45:35 PM ☆

[redacted] [redacted] to [redacted]

Sep 12, 2023, 3:47:54 PM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hey Megan,