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Lindsey Derrington

March 31, 2025

RE: Preservation Bonus Code Amendment

Dear Members of Austin City Council and Austin Planning Commission,

[Preservation Austin](#) exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write today in support of the proposed code amendment, which seeks to rectify Council and Planning Commission's intent for the Preservation Bonus's FAR entitlement.

The Preservation Bonus aims to promote preservation and disincentivize demolition, creating net benefits for preservation, affordability, anti-displacement, and sustainability. **Between 2010 and 2021, Austin averaged 514 residential demolitions per year.** Research from [ReUse People](#) shows that the average size of a demolished home in Austin is 1100 sq ft, while research from AIA Austin's Housing Advocacy Committee shows that new homes average over 2,800 sq ft. We are losing older, smaller, more affordable homes to larger, less affordable ones daily. **In a development climate that incentivizes demolition, the Preservation Bonus creates more opportunities to preserve for those who want to take it.**

Recalibrating the bonus's FAR entitlements to match the Planning Commission and Council's intent is the first step in making the bonus work for more potential projects. Council's July [resolution](#) directed staff to explore additional entitlements, including allowing relocated pre-1961 homes to access the bonus, reducing rear and front setbacks, and allowing for front/back subdivisions. In addition to these recommendations from Council, **increasing site coverage and entitling Preservation Bonus projects to a fourth unit** will increase the bonus's efficacy in adding density to historic neighborhoods (see attached memo for additional info).

Preservation Austin, Austin Infill Coalition, and AIA Austin's Housing Advocacy Committee are honored to partner with City Council and the Planning Commission to create this Preservation Bonus. We look forward to our continued collaboration to make the bonus stronger, unlock its potential to save more Austin homes from the landfill, and generate more housing.

Sincerely,

Melissa Barry, President



MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 28, 2024

TO: Austin City Council

FROM: Preservation Austin

SUBJECT: Preservation Bonus Improvements & Recommendations

On Tuesday, March 26 Preservation Austin, the Austin Infill Coalition, and AIA Austin's Housing Advocacy Committee shared the following recommendations for improving the Preservation Bonus with Austin City Council's Housing & Planning Committee. See our report summarizing our recommendations [here](#) and a copy of our presentation [here](#).

Current Preservation Bonus

For structures built on or before 31 December 1960, the area of the existing dwelling can be excluded from the FAR maximums if 50% of the existing dwelling unit and 100% of the street-facing facade are preserved.

Policy Actions Needed - Reinterpret Current Bonus Language

- **URGENT - FAR Fix:** Reverse interpretation that FAR caps for individual units within a multi-unit development intended to prevent 'stealth McMansions' apply to preservation projects. The current interpretation of the Preservation Bonus subjects bonus projects to general FAR caps, which significantly undermines the bonus.

Policy Actions Needed - Expand Bonus Benefits

- **Fourth Unit:** Exempt the existing unit from allowable unit count.
- **Site Coverage:** Exempt the building cover and impervious cover of the existing qualifying structure, but not more than 10% of site area for either, from building cover and impervious cover calculations.
- **Subdivisions:** Allow for easier front and back subdivisions, including provisions that would allow for flag lots with a minimal 'pole.'
- **Reduce Setbacks:** Consider reducing rear and front setbacks further for projects that preserve a qualifying structure.

- **Relocations:** Allow relocations of a qualifying structure to benefit from the Preservation Bonus. Make the Preservation Bonus compatible with Councilmember Ryan Alter's 2023 House Relocation Resolution No. [20231102-024](#).
- **Accessibility for Existing Homeowners:** Strengthen existing and create new programs to support existing homeowners to access the benefits of HOME/the Preservation Bonus and mitigate displacement of historic communities. This includes but is not limited to, expanding the home repair program, expanding community land trusts, creating forgivable loan programs, tax relief for property owners accessing the bonus, technical assistance, and increased education about these tools and programs. See our [report](#) with the City of Austin on Preservation, Affordability, and Anti-Displacement for more.

Contact Policy & Outreach Planner Meghan King at meghan@preservationaustin.org for any additional questions or to schedule a meeting. We thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lindsey Derrington', with a stylized, looping flourish.

Lindsey Derrington
Executive Director