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October 12, 2020

Austin City Council  
301 W. Second Street  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: African American Cultural Heritage District Investment Initiative Resolution

Dear Mayor Adler, Mayor Pro Tem Garza, and City Council Members,

Preservation Austin has been our city's leading voice for historic preservation since 1953. Our nonprofit exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. In 2007, the City Council passed Resolution 20071213-058, designating the African American Cultural Heritage District. The district, which covers most of Central East Austin, recognizes the concentration of African American landmarks, churches, and businesses, including the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center and Huston-Tillotson University. Preservation Austin supports the African American Cultural Heritage District Investment Initiative Resolution proposed by the East Austin Creative Coalition.

We are particularly supportive of the resolution's desire to update maps and signage for the district; implement a place-making program within the district; and use the East Austin Historic Survey to designate cultural, historic, and heritage landmarks and districts at the local, state, and national levels. The district should be included on all City Zoning Maps. An official detailed map, highlighting landmarks, should be created for the district. Wayfinding signage, public art, and other streetscape features should be used to raise awareness and interest in the district. The Historic Preservation Office should prioritize initiating designation activities within the district to protect Black heritage and correct historic inequities in preservation efforts citywide. Currently, only 47 of 629 City of Austin Landmarks honor Black heritage, while African American and Mexican American neighborhoods in East Austin are seeing unprecedented redevelopment rates.

Historic places are the foundation of our work as a preservation nonprofit. But it's the relationship between these places and the communities that bring them to life, which makes them worth preserving. Preservation Austin recognizes Central East Austin's significance and the city's duty to preserve the rich cultural legacy of the African American community who founded the area. We support the African American Cultural Heritage District, its history, its impact, and its potential.

Sincerely,

Clayton Bullock  
President  
Preservation Austin