

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Linda Y. Jackson, President
Melissa Berry, Vice President
Lori Martin, Vice President
Grace Garret, Secretary
Clay Cary, Treasurer
Clayton Bullock, Immediate Past
President

DIRECTORS

Melissa Ayala
Katie Carmichael
Miriam Conner
Sareta Davis
Harmony Grogan
Stacey Kaleh
Yung Ju Kim

Richard Kooris
Perry Lorenz
Kelley Cooper McClure
Alyson McGee
Elisha Perez
Mueni Rudd
Shubhada Saxena
Michael Strutt

2021-2022 REPRESENTATIVES

Charles Peveto, Austin History Center Association
Bob Ward, Travis County Historical Commission

ADVISOR

Cyndee Lake

STAFF

Lindsey Derrington, Executive Director
Meghan King, Programs and Outreach Planner

May 31, 2022

Terri Myers, Chair
City of Austin
Historic Landmark Commission

Re: 310, 312, 314-318 Colorado Street and 201, 209, 211, and 213 4th Street

Dear Ms. Myers,

Preservation Austin exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write to you today to address the alarming losses that our LGBTQIA community may face with the proposed demolitions of 310, 312, 314-318 Colorado Street and 201, 209, 211, and 213 4th Street. We ask the Historic Landmark Commission to reject the proposed demolitions and support historic zoning for these significant properties in the areas of Community Value and Architecture.

These cases aligns with Preservation Austin's Underrepresented Heritage Advocacy Priority for their associations with Austin's LGQBTIA community. Since adopting this priority, Preservation Austin's Advocacy Committee and our Fowler Family Underrepresented Heritage Interns have done extensive research into Austin's LGBTQIA heritage and the sites associated with it, many of which are no longer extant. To date, no historic landmarks, markers, or designations honor Austin's LGBTQIA heritage. This problem is not unique to Austin—scholars Camden Miller and Alex Bitterman aptly summarized this phenomenon in their essay “Commemorating Historically Significant Gay Places Across the United States”:

“Gay spaces across the United States are steeped in important and ephemeral history. However, the stories of these spaces—and the people that lived the struggle to gain LGBTQ+ rights—are largely unrecorded, undocumented, and are not centrally collected or archived beyond Wikipedia entries and oral histories. Many gay places and gay neighborhoods have no formal means of recognition or historic protection such as those that are available to other classifications of landmarks from state or federal agencies. The pioneering generation that gave rise to the LGBTQ+ rights movement is aging and the time to capture the unprecedented—and largely undocumented—history of their efforts and struggle is endangered.”

Preservation Austin remains committed to researching and protecting the spaces vital to our city's LGBTQIA heritage. We believe it is important to do so because this is a story that is not often told, but one that is essential to the complete story of Austin.

The Warehouse District has been home to a vibrant queer community for many decades, and within its walls and on its streets the very history of Austin's LGBTQIA community has been written. We heard from

the Hanover company as they attempted to deny and downplay the historic associations of these buildings, while submitting their intention to assist a single bar through an undisclosed business agreement. Their good intentions ring hollow. To deny the very significant community and cultural associations of these buildings while promising to protect a single bar is to misunderstand the plight of the LGBTQIA community to have its history recognized.

Demolishing these buildings endangers the very bonds of Austin's present-day LGBTQIA community. With this proposal and the recent release of the demolition permit for the Iron Bear on 6th Street, it is clear that queer spaces in Austin are greatly imperiled. For decades, industrial districts in Austin and nationwide have fostered safe spaces for LGBTQIA communities to thrive. While other parts of Austin were (and sometimes continue to be) openly hostile to LGBTQIA individuals, these historic warehouses provided refuge. They continue to do so today, as demonstrated by the fierce community activism in opposition to this proposed demolition. We are deeply inspired by these efforts and stand in solidarity with the community to protect Austin's LGBTQIA spaces.

The Warehouse District is also a significant location of major LGBTQIA rallies for equality, protests against hate and Pride celebrations in Austin. Furthermore, demolishing even one part of this district would greatly affect the influx of tourism Austin receives during Pride, Queer Bomb, SXSW and other festivals and events that highlight our LGBTQIA community. Without this significant LGBTQIA neighborhood intact, our community would be left scrambling to maintain the same draw for tourists. Austin has something very special here that keeps visitors from around the world coming back for more. We cannot afford to lose this unique district.

The three sites proposed for demolition were identified in the [2011 Downtown Austin Plan](#) (DAP) as contributors to a potential Warehouse District (roughly between 3rd and 5th Streets and Guadalupe and Colorado). Each are examples of the industrial architecture that characterizes this district, and each contribute to the district's viability as a popular destination for entertainment downtown. Since this plan's adoption in 2011, the Warehouse District has only grown more vibrant, arguably due to the proliferation of LGBTQIA spaces.

On the need for preservation of the Warehouse District, the DAP states the following:

"The Warehouse District has become one of Austin's most popular districts and destinations, known for its unique bars, cafes and entertainment venues, all housed in 19th and early 20th century buildings with loading docks now serving as public sidewalks. The area has not been designated as an historic district, and as such, has no official protection and is at risk of being lost to new high-rise development." (p.70)

This prophecy has unfortunately come to pass. In addition to historic designation, recommendations for preserving the Warehouse District included adding a zoning overlay, implementing form-based standards for new construction, and adopting a Transfer of Development Rights program, none of which the City has acted on in the over ten years since the plan was developed. Since the plan was published, several buildings in the Warehouse District have been demolished (see below).

