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July 20, 2022

Austin City Council
301 W 2nd Street
Austin, TX 78701

Re: Budget recommendation for Phase 2 of Equity-Based Historic Preservation Plan

Dear Mayor Adler, Mayor Pro-Tem Alter, and City Council Members:

Preservation Austin exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. As our city's leading nonprofit voice for historic preservation since 1953, we rely on effective collaboration with members of the Historic Landmark Commission (HLC), the City of Austin, and the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) for our success. We are grateful to you for your service and dedication to the City of Austin. We write to you today in support of the Historic Landmark Commission's FY22-23 [budget recommendation](#) of \$300,000 to fund Phase 2 of the Equity-Based Historic Preservation Plan.

The City of Austin has not had a new Historic Preservation Plan [in 40 years](#). Since its adoption, much has changed in Austin and in the field of historic preservation. Equity, sustainability, and cultural heritage are now leading factors guiding preservation efforts. Our city's vibrant economy has contributed to Austin's affordability crisis and the displacement of longtime residents from historic neighborhoods, most especially in East Austin. The need for a strong, community-oriented vision for preservation in Austin has never been greater.

The Equity-Based Historic Preservation Plan seeks to create new, proactive tools to preserve our city's heritage and empower the community to define what matters to them as Austin evolves and grows. We know based on [our research](#) that between 2010 and the end of 2021, residential demolitions per year rose from 271 to 622, an increase of 130%. We also know from a [recent poll](#) that Austinites of all ages believe preserving the character of existing neighborhoods should be a priority for managing Austin's growth. The vision of the Plan needs these additional resources to ensure that the future of preservation in Austin is a proactive and collaborative endeavor accessible to all Austinites.

This work requires Council's financial and political support to succeed. The budget request includes funding for a permanent HPO staff position to manage Phase 2 and coordinate the implementation of the Preservation Plan after its adoption. As the HLC has noted, these resources are essential to engage the community in the preservation planning process, set equitable priorities for historic preservation policy, and better meet the City of Austin's responsibilities to promote and preserve its character and history.

The community engagement focus of Phase 2 is an essential part of the process as the working group continues to seek answers to the questions posed in its foundation. These include whose heritage is represented in designated historic properties; what stories are missing; who benefits from preservation policies, programs, and incentives; and how historic preservation tools can be expanded to address the issues of sustainability, affordability, and displacement. Adequately funding this phase is essential to ensure that the Plan reflects the full range of Austin's past and continuing heritage, and is grounded in public values and priorities.

Preservation Austin is deeply committed to this process, with staff (Meghan King, our Policy and Outreach Planner) and two board members (Linda Y. Jackson, our president, and Alyson McGee) participating in the working group. As the community engagement phase of the Plan unfolds, they and other members of the working group will continue to offer diverse preservation perspectives in a collaboration that successfully reflects the diversity of Austin. The group is doing valuable work, and Phase 2 is crucial to accomplishing this effort.

Preservation Austin welcomes the conversations underlying the Equity-Based Historic Preservation Plan, and as Austin forges ahead with Phase 2, we support the Plan's new approach to preservation, one that reflects twenty-first century values while honoring diverse histories of our past, that encourages investment in historic resources both for their inherent value and because doing so aligns with broader goals of building a more affordable, equitable, and sustainable city.

We thank you for your ongoing leadership as Austin navigates the challenges and opportunities of the years and decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Y. Jackson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Linda Y. Jackson, President