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May 11, 2020

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

Re: Economic Recovery Resources + FY2021 Historic Preservation Office Budget Priorities

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

Preservation Austin has been our city's leading nonprofit voice for historic preservation since 1953. Our success depends on a strong working relationship with the City of Austin, and on a strong and effective Historic Preservation Office (HPO). We are grateful to our city colleagues for all they do.

Our community faces unprecedented challenges in the coming months and years as we work to stop the spread of the coronavirus, then to recover from its economic fallout. As Council explores new tools to aid recovery, please consider Preservation Austin a resource for discussing ways in which preservation can support these efforts. Time and again, reinvestment in historic buildings has proven an economic catalyst during times of downturn, creating local jobs, generating local sales taxes, stabilizing property values, and increasing and extending tourism visits.

In April, Preservation Austin joined the National Trust for Historic Preservation and nearly 400 partners nationwide to ask Congress to further stimulate the economic recovery of nonprofits, small businesses, and the arts and culture sector, while also protecting historic and cultural resources, in the face of the pandemic. We've attached that letter here, along with PlaceEconomics' new report, "Reinvesting in Older Housing – A Key Component of Post COVID-19 Resiliency." Both provide a jumping off point for implementing such strategies here at home.

In the short term, we urge City Council to maintain its FY2020 funding levels for the HPO. With your support, the office has made such significant strides in improving outcomes since the city's 2017 Historic Preservation Program Audit Report. Current funding has enabled staff to fulfill its core mandate of supporting the Historic Landmark Commission, reviewing Certificates of Appropriateness, and certifying tax exemption properties, all while reviewing an unprecedented 900 demolition permits in 2019 alone. The much-needed HPO Manager hired this spring will ensure better coordination between staff, the public, and the greater Planning Department. This brings staffing levels to six, which the 2017 Audit identified as the average for cities of comparable size, with comparable workloads.

Your support has ensured that the HPO is a positive force in our community. The program provides better outreach, from everyday interactions with the public to assisting neighborhoods in the local historic district process. Much-needed historic resource surveys are being conducted as we speak. The

HPO's Translating Community History Project, supported by a prestigious National Park Service Underrepresented Communities Grant, has brought together African American and Mexican American stakeholders to develop new ways to engage our community in preservation.

We also support the HLC's FY2021 Budget Resolution Recommendation request for a 21st century Preservation Plan, while realizing that this is likely a long-term goal. Preservation Austin welcomes conversations about how a new plan – our first since 1981 – could incorporate meaningful preservation goals into future planning efforts citywide. The opportunities and challenges presented by our rapidly-changing urban landscape demand a new approach to preservation, one that reflects today's 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.

Preservation Austin is happy to help identify funding sources to support this work, including Certified Local Government Grants administered by the Texas Historic Commission and the Texas Preservation Trust Fund Grant Program.

We thank you for your leadership during these difficult times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lori Martin".

Lori Martin
President