Dedicated to Outstanding Customer Service for a Better Community

S E R V I C E S O L U T I O N S S U C C E S S

CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS
AGENDA ITEM DEPARTMENT HEAD'S SUMMARY FORM

DEPARTMENT: **Development Services Department**

AGENDA DATE: **Regular Agenda: June 1, 2010**

CONTACT PERSON/PHONE: Mathew McElroy, (915) 541-4193

DISTRICT(S) AFFECTED: 8

SUBJECT:
Discussion and action on Historic Landmark Commission's request that the City Council initiate the rezoning of the property located at 500 S. Hills Street from A-3 (Apartment) to A-3/H (Apartment/Historic) and that the necessary funds be allocated and documents prepared to process such rezoning application pursuant to city code section 20.20.040. (**District 8**)

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION:
See attached report.

PRIOR COUNCIL ACTION:
N/A

AMOUNT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:
N/A

BOARD / COMMISSION ACTION:
Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) – Approval Recommendation (5-0)
City Plan Commission (CPC) – Approval Recommendation (4-3)

**********REQUIRED AUTHORIZATION**********

LEGAL: (if required) N/A **FINANCE:** (if required) N/A

DIRECTOR: Victor Q. Torres_____
Director, Development Services Department

****

APPROVED FOR AGENDA:

CITY MANAGER: _____ **DATE:** _____

Mayor
John F. Cook

City Council

District 1
Ann Morgan Lilly

District 2
Susannah M. Byrd

District 3
Emma Acosta

District 4
Melina Castro

District 5
Rachel Quintana

District 6
Eddie Holguin Jr.

District 7
Steve Ortega

District 8
Beto O'Rourke

City Manager
Joyce A. Wilson

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S E R V I C E S O L U T I O N S S U C C E S S

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
PLANNING DIVISION

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 24, 2010

TO: The Honorable Mayor and City Council
Joyce Wilson, City Manager

FROM: Tony De La Cruz, Planner

SUBJECT: Discussion and Action on 500 S. Hills Street

The City Plan Commission (CPC), on May 6, 2010, voted **4-3** to recommend **APPROVAL** of the request by the Historic Landmark Commission to review the historical merits of Alamo School located at 500 S. Hills Street and to authorize a City-initiated rezoning.

The Historic Landmark Commission is requesting that City Council authorize a City-initiated rezoning application and allocation of City funds for the preparation of related documents to change the zoning of the property from A-3 (Apartment) to A-3/H (Apartment/Historic) in order to preserve the historic character of the school and the Segundo Barrio. The property is 0.7163 acres in size and is a vacant school which is slated for demolition. The original portions of Alamo School were designed by Edward Kneezell and were constructed in 1899 and 1907. This request is being SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO CITY CODE SECTION 20.20.040 B.

Attachments: Staff Report, Zoning Map, Aerial Map, Year 2025 Projected General Land Use Map, Historic Photograph, Letter from the Texas Historical Commission, Minority Report, EPISD Response Letter

Mayor
John F. Cook

City Council

District 1
Ann Morgan Lilly

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City Manager
Joyce A. Wilson

Development Services Department
Victor Q. Torres - Director
2 Civic Center Plaza – 5th Floor · El Paso, Texas 79901 · (915) 541-4622 · Fax (915) 541-4799

City of El Paso – Staff Report

Discussion and Action	Regarding a request by the Historic Landmark Commission, SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO CITY CODE SECTION 20.20.040 B, to authorize a City-initiated rezoning application to place a Historic Overlay designation on the property located at 500 S Hills Street.
Staff Planner	Tony De La Cruz, 915-541-4329, *delacruzja@elpasotexas.gov*
Location	500 S. Hills Street
Legal Description	Lots 11 to 20, Block 59, Magoffin Addition, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas
Acreage	0.7163 acres
Rep District	8
Property Owners	El Paso Independent School District
Applicant	Historic Landmark Commission
Representative	Development Services Department

SURROUNDING ZONING AND LAND USE
North: S-D/sp (Special Development/special permit) Residential
South: A-3 (Apartment) Community Center
East: A-3 (Apartment) School
West: S-D/sp (Special Development/special permit) Residential

THE PLAN FOR EL PASO DESIGNATION: Residential (Central Planning Area)
NEAREST PARK: Tula Irrobali Park (300 Feet)
NEAREST SCHOOL: Alamo Elementary (0 Feet)

APPLICATION DESCRIPTION
The Historic Landmark Commission is requesting that City Council authorize a City-initiated rezoning application and allocation of City funds for the preparation of a Detailed Site Plan and related documents to change the zoning of the property from A-3 (Apartment) to A-3/H (Apartment/Historic) in order to preserve the historic character of the Alamo School building and the Segundo Barrio Neighborhood. The property is 0.7163 acres in size and is a vacant school. The contributing portions of the school were built in 1899 and 1907 and were designed by Edward Kneezell.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION RECOMMENDATION:
Historic Preservation Section: Recommends **APPROVAL** of the Historic Landmark Commission request to initiate a formal rezoning application from A-3 (Apartment) to A-3/H (Apartment/Historic) based on the following criteria.

Alamo Elementary School (originally known as the Second Ward School) located at 500 S. Hills Street was originally constructed in 1899 and was designed by Edward Kneezell, who practiced architecture in El Paso from 1882 until 1912.

Criteria C: Embodiment of distinguished characteristics of an architectural type or specimen

The current primary façade of the building faces west and is divided into seven bays because the two outer bays are non-contributing to the 1899 and 1907 portions of the building. The following description will focus primarily on the remaining five bays. Named after the Battle of the Alamo, Alamo School is two-story, five bay, red brick building with a rubble stone foundation and a partial basement.

Designed in a modest Italianate style, the school has a plan which is rectangular in pattern. The center bay is the primary focal point of the façade and along with the two adjacent bays is extruded to the front with the remaining two bays being recessed. The center bay features a centrally located entrance flanked by two equally spaced 4/4 single hung windows with segmented tops and semi-circular corbelled brick arches. Above the entry way, on the second floor exists six equally spaced 4/4 single hung windows with segmented tops and semi-circular corbelled brick arches and three decorative and functional circular ventilation quoins. Due to renovations that were done to the roof structure, the original dentil blocks, cornice and parapet were removed from the central bay and replaced with a stepped brick parapet.

The remaining four bays flanking the center bay, two bays to each side, have a band of four equally spaced 4/4 single hung windows with segmented tops and semi-circular corbelled brick arches. These four bays still retain the original dentil blocks and cornice which wraps around the sides and rear of the building. While the 1950's and 1990's additions resulted in significant alterations to Alamo Elementary, the 1899 and 1907 portions of the building retain a significant amount of architectural integrity and are readily identifiable as an early 20th century educational facility.

Criteria D: Identification as the work of an architect or master builder whose individual work has influenced the development of the city;

Edward Kneezell (1855-1926) first arrived in the City of El Paso, originally known as Franklin in 1882, nine years after the city became an incorporated municipality. In his thirty years of practicing architecture in El Paso, Mr. Knezell was directly responsible for the design of a variety of schools throughout El Paso which include Alamo Elementary (1899), Sunset Elementary, Morehead Elementary (1901) and San Jacinto (1904) Elementary. While not as well know or as highly regarded by some Mr. Kneezell garnered his highest recognition in the year of 1907 as an associate member of the American Institute of Architects for his design of the seven story "Skyscraper" built to house the offices of the El Paso and Southwestern railroad located at the corner of Franklin and Stanton Streets. This structure was recognized by the Texas Historical Commission in 1981 as a building that "reflects the importance of El Paso as a major retail center" and was the first building in El Paso to be built by the use of a steel framework and housed the first hydraulic elevators in the city.

Criteria I. Exemplification of the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of the city, state or the United States

The El Paso Independent school district was organized in November of 1882. Following the coming of the railroad in the 1880's, El Paso's population grew dramatically. As documented in the 1883 and 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps the population increased from 4,000 to 24,000. Subsequently, due to an increasing school aged population, in 1896 the residents of the Second Ward, now the Segundo Barrio, began to demand a school for their children.

Originally called the Second Ward School, Alamo Elementary was constructed in 1899. Designed to cater primarily to the Anglo population of city, the school was a modest size 2 story red brick structure located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Hills and 4th Street.

From its early inception the school system in El Paso, like many throughout the country, was a segregated system. Faced with a language barrier and the refusal by the school board to teach non-English speaking children, only a small number of Mexicans studied at the early schools. Due to the instability of the Mexican government during the late 1800's and later the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, a mass exodus of refugees caused the population of the City of El Paso to nearly double by 1910. Because of the strong family ties and the proximity of South El Paso to Mexico, the large preponderance of the Mexican immigrant population was largely centered in the Second Ward of the city.

As the Mexican population increased in the area and Anglo families relocated to other sections of the city, Alamo School along with Franklin and Aoy Schools saw a dramatic increase in Mexican immigrant enrollment. One of the major contributing factors, as stated by the author Mario T. Garcia in his book Desert

Immigrants, was the attitude of Mexican parents, that while they had little or no education through their support of the schools, their future generations would be better equipped to succeed. Alamo school played an important role in the early education of the children of Mexican immigrants and later Mexican Americans who as they grew began to demand their place in American society. These early schools eventually gave rise to the Mexican American fight for equality and produced from their ranks people like Bert Corona, a Mexican American civil and labor rights leader, and Representative Paul Moreno, the longest serving Hispanic elected official in country(1967-2008). Due to the loss of such early educational landmarks as Franklin School and Mesa School, Alamo School holds the distinction of being the oldest extant public school in El Paso.

CITY PLAN COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The City Plan Commission provided the following comments on May 6, 2010:
Recommends **APPROVAL** of the request by a vote 4-3, and a minority report was requested by Commissioner Nance.

HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION

The Historic Landmark Commission provided the following comments on April 5, 2010:
Recommends **APPROVAL** of the request by unanimous vote 5-0.

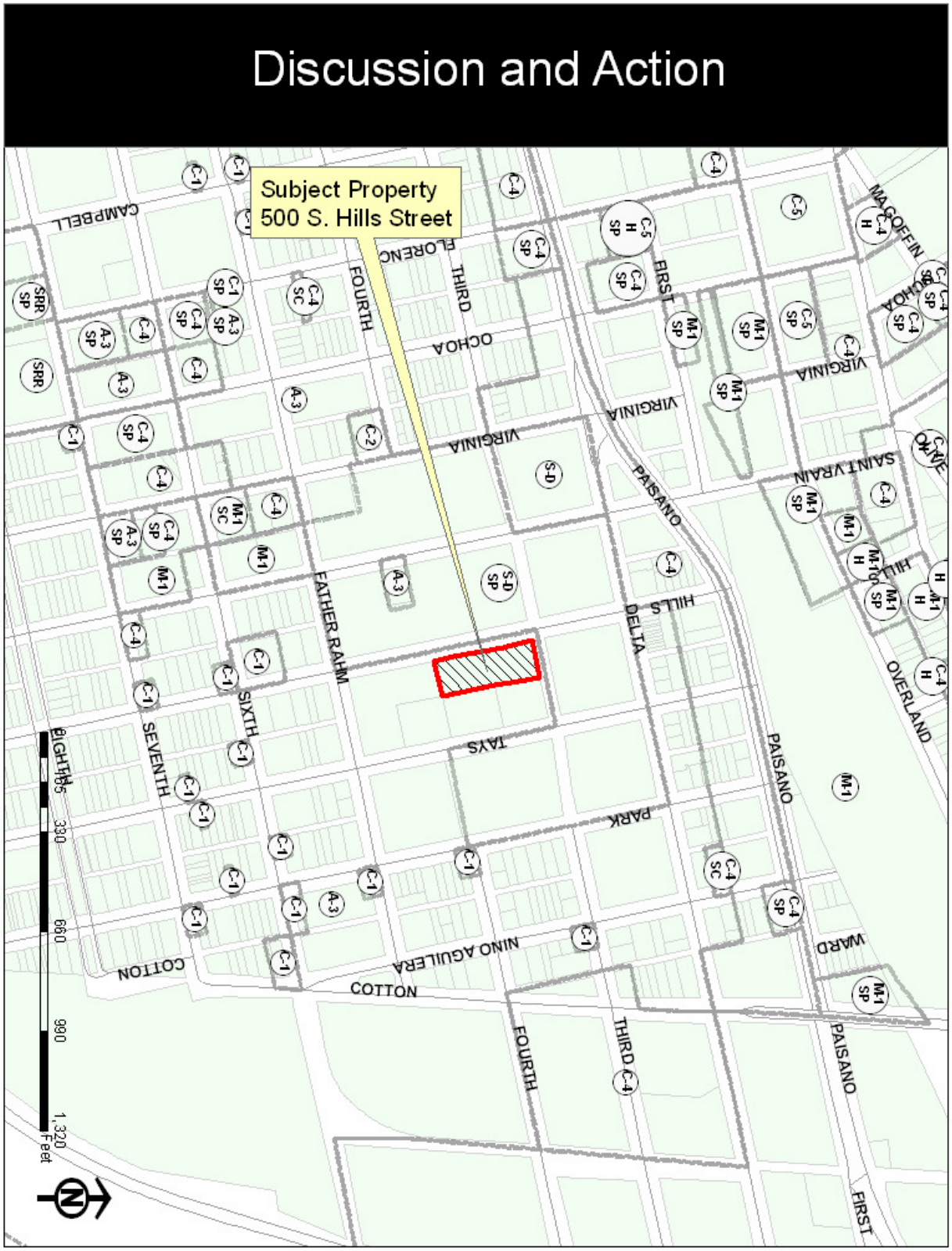
PLANNING DIVISION RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Division recommends **APPROVAL** of the Historic Landmark Commission request to initiate a formal rezoning application from A-3 (Apartment) to A-3/H (Apartment/Historic).

Attachments

1. Zoning Map
2. Aerial Map
3. Year 2025 Projected General Land Use Map
4. Historic Photograph
5. Letter from the Texas Historical Commission
6. Minority Report
7. EPISD Response Letter

ATTACHMENT 1: ZONING MAP



Development Services Department
Victor Q. Torres - Director
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ATTACHMENT 2: AERIAL MAP

Development Services Department
Victor Q. Torres - Director
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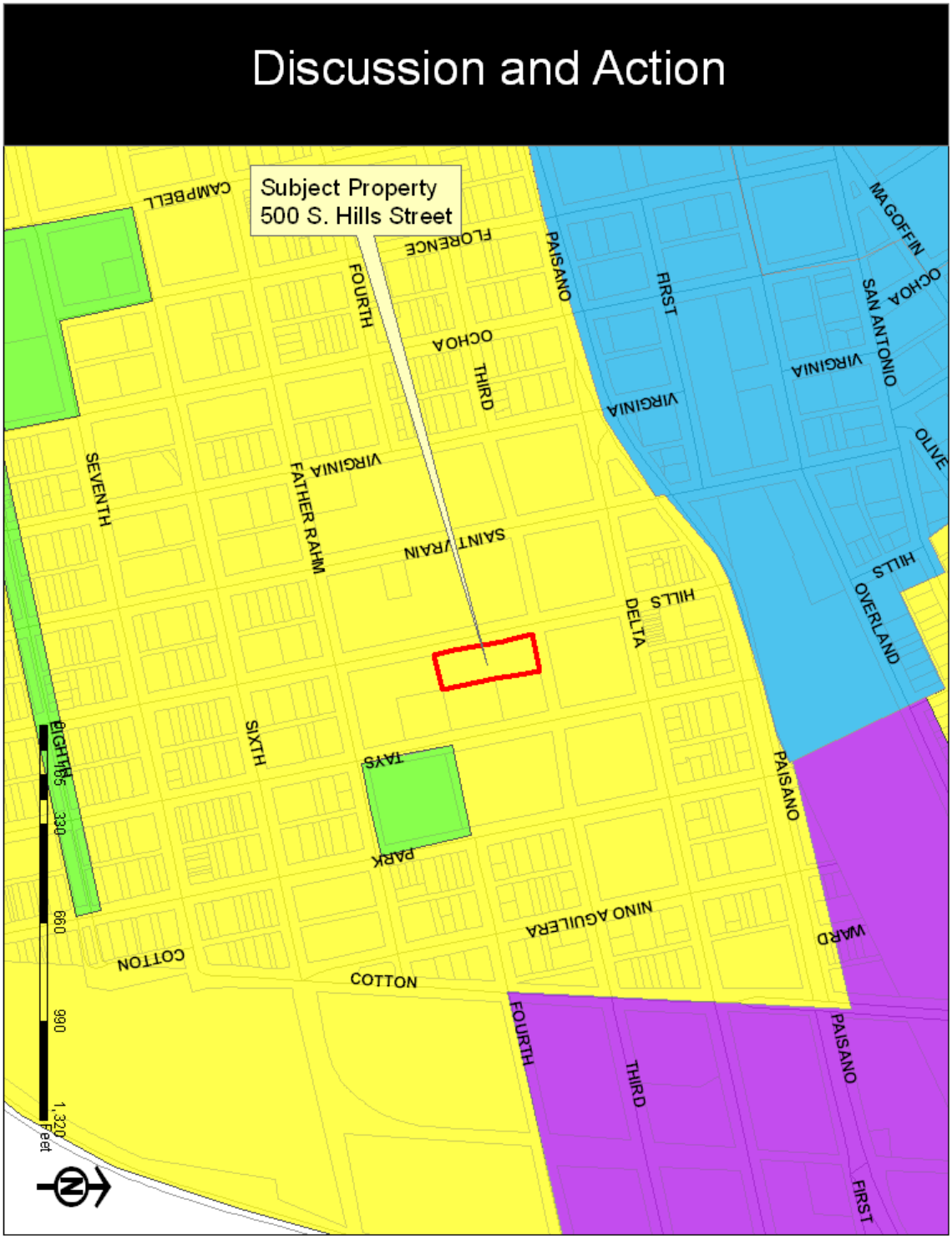
ATTACHEMENT 3: YEAR 2025 PROJECTED GENERAL LAND USE MAP



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ATTACHEMENT 4: HISTORIC & CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS

Alamo School (1899, 1915), kindergarten through sixth. One of the older type of elementary buildings, capacity about 700, in the southern section of the city.

ATTACHEMENT 5: TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION LETTER

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

March 30, 2010

Tony De La Cruz
Planner, Historic Preservation
Development Services Department
2 Civic Center Plaza - 5th Floor
El Paso, Texas 79901

RE: Alamo School, 500 S. Hills Street, El Paso, El Paso County, Texas

Dear Mr. De La Cruz:

Thank you for your interest in preserving the Alamo School in El Paso. The original portions of the building date to 1899 and 1907, forming the core the historic property, and after removal of nonhistoric additions (built in 1951 and 1991) would be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, in the area of Education, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture, at the local level of significance, as an excellent example of an Italianate Style institutional building, and also as a property that served a very important function in the education of the community's children. The Texas Historical Commission encourages the ISD and the City of El Paso to take steps to identify ways that the building could be put to productive use.

Although there are no state or federal restrictions inherent with National Register listing, recognition of a property's historic significance can often lead to its future preservation. National Register listing could qualify a building for a 20% investment tax credit if the property is rehabilitated for commercial use following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Additionally, our staff in the Division of Architecture could provide technical assistance for any work on the building.

We appreciate your efforts to document and preserve this historic property. If you have any questions, you may contact me at 512/463-6013 or by email at greg.smith@thc.state.tx.us. Thank you for your interest in the National Register and in preserving Texas' cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

Gregory W. Smith
National Register Coordinator

RICK PERRY, GOVERNOR • JON T. HANSEN, CHAIRMAN • MARK WOLFE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
P.O. BOX 12276 • AUSTIN, TEXAS • 78711-2276 • P 512.463.6100 • F 512.475.4872 • TDD 1.800.735.2989 • www.thc.state.tx.us

ATTACHEMENT 6: MINORITY REPORT

Minority Report
Considerations

Request: Discussion and action regarding a request by the Historic Landmark Commission, SUBMITTED PURSUANT TO CITY CODE SECTION 20.20.040 B, to authorize a City-initiated rezoning application to place a Historic Overlay on Alamo School.
Zoning Case: N/A
Location: 500 South Hills Street

History: On April 5, 2010 the Historic Landmark Commission voted unanimously in favor of requesting authorization for a city-initiated rezoning to place a Historic overlay designation on Alamo School, located at 500 South Hills Street. Staff recommended approval of the request and the CPC affirmed a recommendation to authorize a city-initiated rezoning to place a Historic overlay on the property. The recommendation is based on section 20.20.050, Historic Landmark designation criteria subsections C, D, and I. The Historic Landmark Preservation ordinance was approved by City Council on June 27, 1978 and declares as a matter of public policy that the protection, enhancement, preservation and use of historic landmarks is a public necessity and is required in the interest of the culture, prosperity, education and general welfare of the people.

Current Minority Opinion: The City Plan Commission has been consistent in supporting the recommendations of staff based on the historical significance of the sites.

However, there are other facts that City Council should consider in approving or denying the request:

1. A cooperative arrangement should be sought between the El Paso Independent School District and the City of El Paso to develop an alternative plan to conserve the historic portion of the structure and meet the requirements of the school district.

Final Recommendation: That the City of El Paso, the El Paso Independent School District, the Historic Landmark Commission and El Paso Housing Authority develop a cooperative arrangement to conserve the historic portion of the school and also meet the requirements of the school district.

ATTACHEMENT 7: EPISD RESPONSE LETTER

El Paso Independent School District®

Lorenzo Garcia, Ed.D.
Superintendent

March 11, 2010

Mr. Tony De La Cruz
Planner, Historic Preservation
Development Services Department
#2 Civic Center Plaza, 5th Floor
El Paso, Texas 79901

Re: **Alamo Elementary School**
Project No. 09.967

Dear Mr. De La Cruz:

Thank you for your letter of March 4, 2010, regarding the El Paso Historic Landmark Commission's efforts to formally designate Alamo Elementary School a historic landmark. We understand that initial steps for this proposed designation commenced at the Commission's meeting of February 17, 2010, and that the Historic Preservation Division will be making a presentation to the Commission at its March 15, 2010 meeting. The Commission will take formal action on the matter at that time.

El Paso Independent School District fully supports and subscribes to the basic tenets of historical preservation of significant structures that qualify as such under the provisions of the Municipal City Code. The District, however, does not believe that Alamo Elementary School qualifies for such designation for a variety of reasons, a few of which follow. In our opinion, the structure does not reflect the character or cultural characteristics of the area given the nature of the new housing units recently constructed by the City of El Paso Housing Authority, surrounding the school building. In this regard, the existing school building does not have any close relation to the architectural styles of the area buildings. As you noted in your letter, the school building is not within a historic overlay zoned area. The structure is neither a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, a National Historic Landmark, nor is it entered into the National Register of Historic Places.

Our Facilities staff has researched Alamo School's construction history and found that the original building dating back to 1899 was comprised of eight classrooms constructed on two floors. The first major addition was constructed in 1907 and included eight classrooms on two floors and an auditorium. This major addition also changed the front entrance to the building from the southern front to the western elevation. Over the years, the building exterior has been modified numerous times and has lost some of its major architectural elements such as the portico. In other instances, the building has been modified as it was for example, with the addition of a parapet wall over the main entrance. Differential settling has resulted in numerous cracks of some size in the exterior wall, in some cases running through the brick itself.

Interestingly enough, our research suggests that the original Douglass School building which predates Alamo School to 1891, is still standing and remains in use in the vicinity of South Kansas and Fourth Street. We believe it is currently the site of a delivery business. Furthermore, there exists a building at S. Oregon and Third Street that once housed Aoy School (Mexican Preparatory School) from 1895-1899. This was the original location of the US Customs House which also dates back to October 1883.

6531 Boeing Drive • El Paso, Texas 79925-1086 • (915) 887-5400 • FAX: (915) 887-5484
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 20100, El Paso, Texas 79998-0100

ATTACHEMENT 5: EPISD LETTER CONTINUED

Finally, the District's 2007 bond referendum provided for the "reconstruction" of Alamo School as presented to the voters. Our design work thus far has been based on the premise that the entire building would be razed and a new school building constructed on the site. The District did review options aimed at preserving the original school building, however, these did not prove to be as cost effective as the originally intended scope. Furthermore, because of the limited land area available we believe it most prudent to make use of every bit of real estate on the site to maximize the building footprint and playground/common areas for the students. Preservation of the original school building within the new building design will result in the loss of valuable land area, thus greatly hampering our ability to improve on the existing undesirable situation. We firmly believe that this would not be a cost effective, responsible expenditure of tax payer dollars, possibly requiring a redirection of the project funds. I am confident that the proposed new school building design reflects many of the original school building architectural elements and complements the rich culture of the "Segundo Barrio" and this school community as a whole. The design will provide state of the art technological and building features for our deserving students of this proud neighborhood.

We await the Historic Landmark Commission's decision on this matter.

Sincerely,

Lorenzo Garcia, Ed.D.

LG/HM/mr

Copy to: Board of Trustees