



Members of the WPA
Historic Landmark
Designation Subcommittee

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The complete membership
of the WPA and its supporters
includes over 100 individuals.

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October 5, 2016

Historic and Design Review Commission
City of San Antonio
1901 S. Alamo
San Antonio, TX 78204

RE: 115 S. Zarzamora St./Malt House HDRC Case No.: 2016-363

Dear Commission,

On behalf of the members of the Westside Preservation Alliance, a community-based historic preservation organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of San Antonio's Mexican American and working class communities, **we write to express our firm opposition to the proposed demolition of the former Malt House at 115 S. Zarzamora St. and request that HDRC uphold the spirit and meaning of the building's historic designation status and deny the request to demolish what has already been affirmed by the City of San Antonio to be an historic landmark.**

Beginning in 2009, the Westside Preservation Alliance worked with the Office of Historic Preservation to identify and document potential historic landmarks in the Westside, an area that has long been neglected by the Office of Historic Preservation. Through these efforts, City Council designated twenty-two Westside properties as local historic landmarks on March 21, 2013 including 115 S. Zarzamora St.

At this time it was recognized that 115 S. Zarzamora St. met the following criteria for local landmark designation:

- Its value as a visible reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event [35-607(b)1];
- Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature [35-607(b)7]; and
- It is distinctive in character, interest or value; strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio, Texas or the United States [35-607(b)11].

While the Malt House recently closed its doors, the closing of a business in no way reverses a historic landmark structure's cultural or historical significance. Indeed, businesses come and go in landmarked buildings all the time. Kaufman, in his letter to the Office of Historic Preservation dated September 28, 2016, wrongly claims that the site's significance has nothing to do with the building and therefore the building should be allowed to come down.

That a car-hop's structure is described as insignificant to its history is simply preposterous. Furthermore, of the hundreds of historic landmarks across the country that celebrate a significant person, event, or historical heritage, whether or not a famous architect built the associated structure, that structure is the embodiment of the significance of the site. Thus, if you demolish an historic landmark you have essentially killed the landmark. As you know, there is no justification for removing the historic landmark status of 115 S. Zarzamora St. as the structure that is representative of the site's significance continues to stand, *but* demolishing the building would erase its history – it would erase its “value as a visible reminder of the cultural heritage of the community;” it would erase its “physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature;” it would erase “its distinctive character [that] strongly exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, ethnic or historical heritage of San Antonio” – all three of the criteria under which the property was designated. That the Office of Historic Preservation is supporting the request to approve demolition of 115 S. Zarzamora St. demonstrates how the history and culture of San Antonio's Westside continues to be devalued and belittled by outside entities. Furthermore, it represents the OHP's willingness to negotiate the meaning of historic designation, and this is a violation of the public trust. That this icon of our community would be torn down to build a 7-Eleven is all the more insulting to our cultural heritage as well as to our city's approved historic designation guidelines. That the address would potentially maintain historic designation even after the building is demolished would be a violation of why the designation was granted in the first place, it would be a violation of the spirit and meaning of historic designation, and most concerning it could allow the developer to benefit from historic tax credits meant to support the existence of historic buildings and not to benefit new construction over a demolished landmark. Finally, offering to save benches, signage, and canopies – mere garnishes to the main dish - is a demeaning interpretation of the building's historic designation and its significance in the community, just as offering to build a 7-Eleven that mimics the design of the extant structure is a bizarre Walt Disney-esque fraud.

What is the message when a building is deemed more than qualified for historic designation, but three years later a potential 7-Eleven is enough to violate the spirit and meaning of the designation by demolishing the building? Are these the principles by which OHP & HDRC operate? Where is the credibility? When did integrity go out of style?

In conclusion, we find the request to demolish this landmarked Westside building irresponsible and unacceptable. The structure located at 115 S. Zarzamora St. is representative of more than one business. It is representative of tradition, values, and community. It is unfathomable that a structure with such a rich history – a history that has been previously acknowledged as significant in this very room - would be demolished to make way for a 7-Eleven. **We ask that you vote to deny the request to demolish 115 S. Zarzamora St.**

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Members of the Westside Preservation Alliance

CC: Shirley Gonzales, District 5 City Council Member