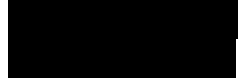


Valerie Venecia, Heritage Tourism Coordinator  
El Paso County Economic Development Department  
500 E. San Antonio, Suite 312  
El Paso, Texas 79901

February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021

D.J. Sevigny



Dear Ms. Venecia:

First, I would like to give my most sincere thanks to you, El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego, and the El Paso County Commissioners Court for being dedicated advocates of historic preservation in El Paso. Our county has an incredibly rich and complex heritage, and your continued support is crucial for protecting it for future generations to learn from and experience. Second, while I currently serve as the Chair of the City's Historic Landmark Commission (HLC), I am writing to you on my own accord and not on behalf of the HLC.

Yesterday evening, I had the opportunity to review a letter from Judge Samaniego dated February 10th, 2021 addressed to Mayor Leeser and El Paso City Council to request amendments to Chapter 20.20.080 of the El Paso City Ordinance. This letter is in response to recent opposition to the County's efforts to list the proposed Downtown El Paso Historic District into the National Register of Historic Places. Amending Subpart A(1) would alleviate potentially unwanted oversight from the HLC on properties within historic districts listed at the federal level and all Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks; however, **I must caution against any potential action City Council may take on Subparts A(2) and (B) of this chapter.** These sections enable the City's Historic Preservation Office (HPO) and HLC to conduct its duties within the nine locally-designated historic districts, otherwise known as districts outlined with "H" overlays by the City's Department of Planning and Inspections.

If 20.20.080(A)2 and (B) are changed or omitted, the City's HPO and HLC will no longer be able to function as intended. This, in turn, would gravely endanger the City's status as a Certified Local Government (CLG). Jointly administered by the National Park Service and Texas Historical Commission, a local government's status as a CLG makes a commitment to state and federal partners by playing an active role in preserving, protecting, and increasing awareness of its unique cultural heritage. CLG status also enables the HPO and HLC to uphold historic preservation guidelines at the local level and give City residents a valuable forum to discuss undertakings that affect the neighborhoods we hold in the highest regard. Additional benefits are also available to CLGs. As noted by the Texas Historical Commission, "The benefits of becoming a CLG are access to technical assistance from CLG Program Staff, a network of local preservation commissioners and historic preservation officers from around the state, workshops and other trainings specific to local preservation challenges, and the annual CLG Grant Program." Ultimately, the City of El Paso would no longer serve as local partner in historic preservation, dismantle the legal framework for the HPO and HLC to

operate under, and be ineligible for the benefits provided by the Texas Historical Commission and National Park Service if it loses its status as a CLG.

This past Monday, February 8th, the HLC voted to approve the complete revisions of Chapter 20.20; a major undertaking the HPO and HLC have been working on since 2015. The next step in this process is to send the revisions to the City Planning Commission for review and action, followed by final review and action by the City Council. Under these revisions, Chapter 20.20.080 (A) and (B) are planned to be amended as follows:

A. No person or entity shall construct, reconstruct, alter, change, remove, demolish or fail to maintain, any of the following, unless a Certificate of Appropriateness or a Certificate of Demolition has been approved by the HLC or approval granted through administrative review:

~~1. Any permanent feature on a property listed as a Texas Antiquities Landmark or on the National Register of Historic Places;~~

12. Any building, object, site, landscape architectural feature, or group of such designated with an "H"-overlay or as a historic landmark as defined by this chapter and designated by the City Council.

B. No building permit shall be issued for such proposed work until a Certificate of Appropriateness has first been issued by the Historic Landmark Commission or approval granted through administrative review. The Certificate of Appropriateness or administrative review approval shall be in addition to and not in lieu of any building permit that may otherwise be required.

With the exception of grammatical edits, subparts (A)2 and (B) remain unchanged.

I strongly urge Judge Samaniego and the El Paso County Commissioners Court to continue collaboration with Mayor Leeser and City Council before the Council's next meeting on February 16th. It is imperative for all parties to fully understand what's at stake and tactfully amend Chapter 20.20.080 by following the HLC's recommended revisions. Doing so will ensure the City's status as a CLG remains in place for the benefit of all El Pasoans.

Sincerely,

D.J. Sevigny