



Diocese of El Paso

Catholic Pastoral Center

June 24, 2020

Office of the Bishop

Ricardo Samaniego, County Judge
500 East San Antonio
El Paso, Texas 79901

Carlos Leon, County Commissioner, Precinct 1
500 East San Antonio
El Paso, Texas 79901

David Stout, County Commissioner, Precinct 2
500 East San Antonio
El Paso, Texas 79901

Vince Perez, County Commissioner, Precinct 3
500 East San Antonio
El Paso, Texas 79901

Carl Robinson, County Commissioner, Precinct 4
500 East San Antonio
El Paso, Texas 79901

Honorable Judge and Commissioners:

I am pleased that El Paso County is working to establish two new national historic districts that will commemorate and promote the rich history of our urban core: one in Downtown and one in Segundo Barrio. However, it is with great concern that I am following your efforts to establish the boundary between these two proposed districts.

Segundo Barrio was established circa 1885, only a dozen years after the City of El Paso was incorporated, and since that time has been clearly defined by boundaries that are both physical and cultural. It is a place where countless immigrants first entered the United States, especially from Mexico; and during the Mexican Revolution, many thousands crossed the bridge from Ciudad Juárez, a few blocks south of Sacred Heart Church, in order to seek refuge, flee religious persecution and start a new life.

Since 1893, Sacred Heart Church, established on south Oregon Street between 4th Avenue and Father Rahm, by Fr. Carlos Pinto, is the anchor of the neighborhood, addressing the spiritual and many social needs of the community and providing them with numerous ministries for this purpose. In addition, its Jesuit priests have traditionally served as voices for justice, charity and reconciliation. Due to its long history, many in the city still connect with Sacred Heart.

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When similar threats to the integrity and history of the Segundo Barrio arose in 2006, my predecessor, Bishop Armando Ochoa together with the Fr. John Stowe, then Vicar General (now bishop of Lexington, KY), and Fr. Rafael Garcia, SJ, at the time pastor, drafted a letter to the Mayor and City Council regarding major concerns that would have affected the people and the barrio.

The current plan to exclude Sacred Heart Church along with many other historic buildings from the proposed Segundo Barrio National Historic District, transferring them to the downtown historic district would be a grave mistake as has been expressed by so many in the community. It would arbitrarily divide this historic neighborhood of immigrant families. One suspects that there are powerful business interests at play, as Father Rafael Garcia suggested in his letter to you as well as in his public comment on Monday.

Undoubtedly, the Segundo Barrio needs help and improvements. But plans that are not inclusive, but rather drive out the more vulnerable people in the name of an exclusive progress is not in the interest of the Common Good.

I urge you to reject the so-called "Option 2", which divides Segundo and instead support "Option 3", which would establish a national historic district in Segundo Barrio that conforms closely to the Second Ward's historic borders and includes Sacred Heart Church and the surrounding neighborhood in its entirety.

The people who reside there – as well as many others with connections to the barrio -- deserve an undivided district that fully respects their unique history and culture and the Diocese of El Paso proudly and firmly stands with them.

Respectfully,



Bishop Mark J. Seitz, DD
Bishop of El Paso