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December 4, 2023

RE: HOME Initiative

Dear Mayor Watson, Mayor Pro Tem Ellis, and members of Austin City Council,

[Preservation Austin](#) exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. In keeping with this mission, **we write to you today in support of the proposed HOME ordinance with the Preservation Bonus and Sustainability Bonus included.** These bonus programs make HOME stronger, in every sense, by supporting the preservation of existing housing and the affordable, sustainable, and cultural benefits that this housing embodies. Furthermore, they have the potential to **bring our community together by bridging preservation and density goals to create more accessible and vibrant neighborhoods across Austin.**

Adopting these bonuses would support the preservation of historic streetscapes paired with neighborhood-scale density. They would make preserving the original house a viable option for homeowners and developers who might otherwise demolish:

- The **Preservation Bonus** would exempt homes constructed before 1960 from a site's FAR for projects adding new housing units to a property. Homeowners or developers could use that FAR for their new housing units in exchange for preserving 100% of the pre-1960 home's street-facing facade, in addition to preserving at least 50 percent of the pre-1960 home's structure overall. Review criteria for these projects must be based on historic preservation best practices, drawing inspiration from the citywide Historic Design Standards approved by City Council in 2022.
- The **Sustainability Bonus** would exempt homes constructed after 1960 from a site's FAR for projects adding new housing units to a property. Homeowners or developers could use that FAR for their new housing units in exchange for preserving 50% of the post-1960 home's materials. This lower preservation threshold recognizes the challenges that this housing type presents.

No one can say that our current land development code fosters a good environment for preservation. The [numbers are clear](#): Between 2010 and 2021, Austin has averaged 514 residential demolitions per year. Within this period Council Districts 3, 9, and 10 each experienced more than 1,000 residential demolitions; Districts 5 and 7 each experienced more than 800 demolitions; and District 1 saw more than 600. Research from [ReUse People](#) shows that the average size of a demolished home in Austin is 1100 sq ft, while research from AIA Austin's Housing Advocacy

Committee shows that new homes, often built in place of the smaller ones, average over 2,800 sq ft. **We are losing older, smaller, more affordable homes to larger, less affordable ones every day.**

Austin's existing tools for preserving these homes have not kept pace with demolitions. Historic zoning for individual landmarks and historic districts is extremely important, but its scope and reach is limited. To date, less than 1% of Austin's parcels are protected from demolition by historic zoning. Since 2013, the City has designated an average of just eight local landmarks each year, and Austin, which has only eight local historic districts, has not seen a new district since the creation of Rogers-Washington Holy Cross in 2020. District 9 and District 3, for example, contain the highest percentage of Austin's older housing stock, with 65 percent and 37 percent of their homes built before 1960. Most of these homes will never become a city landmark or a contributor to a local historic district; we have to create better avenues for their preservation.

The Preservation Bonus is one such solution. **Balancing true preservation with meaningful development entitlements will change the math on what is preserved and what is demolished, and potentially lead to better preservation outcomes than we are witnessing today.** Like City Council's recent [resolution](#) seeking to remove barriers to relocating houses within city limits, the HOME ordinance will keep existing housing out of the landfill and preserve these smaller, older, more naturally occurring affordable homes for Austin's families.

We thank the City Council and the Planning Commission for seeing the value and promise in the Preservation Bonus and Sustainability Bonus amendments. Preservation Austin's work is grounded in the belief that preservation can meaningfully support affordable and sustainable housing outcomes while maintaining our city's history and culture. These goals should not be at odds, and these bonuses are an incredible opportunity to show that this is possible.

Thank you for your service to the City of Austin.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa A. Barry". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Melissa Barry, President