

Good Stewardship: Repurposing Sims

April 30, 2024 | 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Topic:

Equity-Based Preservation Plan

Presenter:

Cara Betron, City of Austin

Number of Attendees:

18

Meeting Notes:

- Former Sims Elementary School campus is part of the district's repurposing process to identify future uses for underutilized sites that are responsive to community needs
 - Background information can be found on the district website >> [Site Repurposing | Austin ISD](#)
- City of Austin is in process of finalizing the *Equity-Based Preservation Plan*, which will replace Austin's 1981 historic preservation plan
 - Developed by a community working group over 12 months
 - Preservation Plan Working Group appointed by the Historic Landmark Commission; members came from 19 different zip codes, diverse representation of the City's residents
 - More than 300 people helped shape the draft plan.
 - Learn more >> [Equity-Based Preservation Plan - PublicInput](#)
- Place is at the center of preservation, but the "who" is just as important
- Plan has 14 draft goals divided into 3 themes:
 - What we preserve (think broadly)
 - Who preserves (invite and support)
 - How we preserve (be strategic and effective)
- The [draft plan](#) is available for public review and feedback through May 31, 2024
- Q: When does it go before the council?
 - City staff expects the plan will go before City Council in December
- Recommendations from the *Equity-Based Preservation Plan* that Cara recommended for discussion as they might apply to Sims:
 - Create spaces for people to share stories and places that matter to them

- Gather stories that tell Austin’s diverse history across different cultures and languages.
- Create a cultural mapping program to identify significant places, businesses, and other resources, prioritizing historically marginalized communities and neighborhoods where longtime residents face a high risk of displacement
- Tell the full stories of historic places in Austin through creative interpretation.
- Recognize the significant external costs associated with demolition by adopting policies and practices that incentivize alternatives.
- Help people access knowledge and resources and preserve community stories.
- Develop educational programming for youth.
- Develop programs that connect the next generation of Austinites with legacy businesses, local heritage, and economic opportunities
- Comments
 - Concerns about saying “marginalized people” rather than “people” first
 - Preservation is not just bricks and mortar, but also stories; would like to see that packaged together
 - *“As far as the schools go, many East side schools are named for people. Would love for the community, especially newcomers, to know the story of the Sims namesake, Mary Jane Sims.”*
 - Suggestion: *“Every year at the beginning of school provide a video of the history of Ms. Sims and the history of the school so students, parents, and teachers become more familiar with the history”*
 - Often sites are “history on a stick” with a plaque that are sometimes hard to read and don’t tell the whole story
 - Creative interpretation can be much more to give people the fuller story to give people a sense of place
 - Online map
 - Temporary billboards
 - Podcasts
 - Website
 - So much has changed in the neighborhood around Sims and when we think about cultural mapping sometimes it feels like a memorial
 - Is there a way to support what is still happening?
 - There is a lot of grief and loss about what was
 - Common theme heard all over Austin
 - Draft recommendation in the plan is to document all the places that have been lost in the community

- An element of the plan is that it doesn't stop with just bricks and mortar, but also ideas about how to support legacy businesses and programs
- Recommendation 38 from the plan (develop programs with economic opportunities), seems really similar to what we heard during the initial community conversations for repurposing Sims
- Issue raised regarding the weatherization process and the difficulty to implement, including cost, to protect against future events
- *"The population of children moves in different spots around Austin throughout time and I hope the property remains the school district's for when the population of children in the area increases again. Any proposed use of the property should take that into account. Also, the district should write the history of the site into the title for the property."*
- Important to develop educational programming for youth
 - These buildings have stories that are important to share so they know what happened before them and give them a sense of pride
- Sims was an institution and an iconic beacon for those who attended
 - Dr. Ira Bell was the principal and there were crossing guards, but was restricted to only 5th and 6th grade boys; community member convinced Bell to let her be a crossing guard
- Don't want the site to be stagnant
 - Springdale Green is a great example of how it can serve the community - offering health services
- Needs to be environmentally sustainable
 - Emphasis on keeping the build
 - *"I would prefer not to have additional impervious coverage in the area. We already have very little tree cover in the area and it would just worsen the heat island effect in the neighborhood."*

Action Items:

- Next meeting is Tuesday, May 21 at 6pm