



# CITY OF SAN ANTONIO OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## HISTORIC AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION COMMISSION ACTION

This is not a Certificate of Appropriateness and cannot be used to acquire permits

October 21, 2015

**HDRC CASE NO:** 2015-386  
**ADDRESS:** 1617 E COMMERCE ST  
**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** NCB 593 BLK A LOT 1 THRU 18  
**LANDMARK:** Friedrich Refrigeration Complex  
**APPLICANT:** James McKnight/Brown & Ortiz, P.C. - 112 E Pecan, Ste 1360  
**OWNER:** Friedrich Lofts, Ltd - 7324 Gaston Ave

### REQUEST:

The applicant is seeking HDRC recommendation to remove historic designation for the majority of the property at 1617 E Commerce (Friedrich Refrigeration Complex). The applicant proposes to maintain historic designation for the three buildings closest to E Commerce.

### FINDINGS:

a) The Friedrich Refrigeration Complex is a local historic landmark and is also listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The earliest part of the complex was constructed in 1923 for the Edward Friedrich Refrigeration Company, which was founded in 1883. In 1925, this location became the consolidated operations for the business when the old plant nearby burned down. Architect Harvey P. Smith was hired to design a new showroom and office space. The plant was expanded over the next 30 years and remained in operation until its closure in 1990. The complex remains a prominent and important landmark on the City's East Side. b) The Friedrich Complex consists of 14 buildings located on the property at 1617 E Commerce. Of these buildings, 11 are found by both the Office of Historic Preservation to be contributing. The entire property at 1617 E Commerce features a historic zoning overlay. c) A request to demolish 8 contributing buildings within the Friedrich Complex was reviewed by the HDRC on September 17, 2014. The HDRC approved demolition for 4 of the requested buildings which were found to either be on the interior of the structure or to be of less significance. Prior to HDRC action, a task force met with the owner of three separate occasions to review the details of the request and thoroughly explore the claim for economic hardship. The applicant currently wishes to remove historic designation for the 8 buildings which were previously requested for demolition. In accordance with UDC Section 35-606, a zoning request to remove historic designation must first be recommended by the HDRC. d) UDC Section 35-606 requires that new and compelling evidence and a negative evaluation according to the same criteria under which the property was designated is required for the HDRC to consider removal of designation. No new evidence has been provided by the applicant, and staff finds that no loss of significance as occurred which would result in ineligibility for designation. e) Local historic designation necessitates HDRC review of demolition and places design controls for infill construction and additions. If an owner wishes to seek demolition, information supporting an economic hardship or loss of significance must be presented to the HDRC. Staff strongly encourages the owner of this property to continue to make applications to the HDRC through this established process. f) The applicant has indicated that the current request for removal of historic designation is for "marketing" purposes. The Friedrich Complex is an excellent candidate for adaptive reuse using local, state, and federal historic tax incentives. However, utilization of the incentives is contingent on the retention of its contributing structures. Removal of local designation not only removes the property's candidacy for local tax incentives, it also releases a potential developer from any design-review requirements. The historic and design review process is put in place for historic landmarks and districts to ensure quality, compatible development in relation to the places the community wishes to protect. Removal of historic designation is a negative approach to economic development which undermines community

efforts of the past.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Local historic designation is an important tool which protects historical and community resources from demolition, provides incentives for rehabilitation which spurs economic development, and places design review requirements on the property which ensure quality and compatible construction. Staff does not recommend approval to remove the historic zoning overlay from any portion of this property. If circumstances have changed and additional demolition is requested, staff recommends the applicant submit additional information to the HDRC substantiating that claim. If the HDRC does not approve a demolition request, the applicant has an opportunity for appeal through the established process.

**COMMISSION ACTION:**

Denied.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shanon Shea Miller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Shanon Shea Miller  
Historic Preservation Officer