



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

December 2, 2020

HDRC CASE NO: 2020-466

COMMON NAME: 726 Fredericksburg Rd / LIZ DAVIES GREENSPACE

ADDRESS: SOUTHEAST CORNER OF FREDERICKSBURG RD AND W FRENCH PL
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LEGAL DESCRIPTION: NCB 3030 BLK 1 LOT 1 & W 25 FT OF 2

APPLICANT: William Lambert/French & Michigan - 115 Michigan Ave

OWNER: City of San Antonio - 839966 PO Box

REQUEST:

A request for review by the Historic and Design Review Commission regarding eligibility of the property located at the southwest corner of Fredericksburg Rd and W French Pl, known as Liz Davies Park, for landmark designation.

FINDINGS:

- a. On October 13, 2020, William Lambert submitted a request for review of historic significance of the property at 726 Fredericksburg Rd, known as Liz Davies Greenspace, located in the Beacon Hill neighborhood conservation district (NCD-5) of Council District 1.
- b. DEMOLITION AND DESIGNATIONS COMMITTEE: OHP staff visited the site on November 5, 2020. The Demolition & Designation Committee (DDC) held a virtual site visit on November 24, 2020. Feedback was received from Commissioner Fetzer in favor of designation.
- c. HISTORIC CONTEXT: The triangular parcel at 726 Fredericksburg Rd is a result of the linear development pattern of the Beacon Hill neighborhood meeting the radial thoroughfare connecting San Antonio with Fredericksburg to the northwest. Established as a wagon road in the 1840s, Fredericksburg Road had already shifting to accommodate automobile traffic by 1919, when the Beacon Hill Company sold this parcel to the City of San Antonio. As residential development expanded to the north and west in the 1920s, this area experienced a commercial boom; many of the structures facing this corridor date to this period of growth in the early 1920s. By 1923, the Old Spanish Trail Association, which had moved its headquarters from Mobile to San Antonio, designated this stretch of Fredericksburg Rd as part of their commemorative highway route stretching from St. Augustine, FL to San Diego, CA. A substantial portion of the infrastructure along Fredericksburg Road, including sidewalks, shelters, and landscaping of pedestrian greenspaces, are related to the establishment of the OST and the broader Good Roads movement, which promoted highway improvements and expansion. The City Council dedicated the greenspace to Liz Davies in 2004 in recognition of her significant contributions to the community.
- d. SITE CONTEXT: Liz Davies Greenspace is located in an area historically called Uptown, which was identified by OHP as an eligible historic district. Many of the structures date to the 1920s and reflect the Spanish Colonial architectural style which was popular during this time period.
- e. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: The property at 726 Fredericksburg Rd known as Liz Davies Greenspace is a triangular traffic island with a central sculpture and gardens. The greenspace was created in 1919 by the City of San Antonio and described as a city park by 1922. The site is bounded by Fredericksburg Rd to the southwest, W French Pl to the north, and Michigan Ave to the east. The site is flat and mostly covered in grass, with old-growth trees, cactus, and other plants. There are married sidewalks along the southwest and north sides of the parcel, and a bus

shelter just south of the northwest corner. There is a central sculpture on a flagstone-clad plinth surrounded by cactus and a low stone border. The turquoise-colored sculpture, created by artist and Beacon Hill resident Danville Chadbourne, has four lobes with an open center with a red and gray base. A low-walled stone planter is situated at the south corner of the parcel; there is another rubble bordered garden area near the northeast corner of the parcel. The north edge of the parcel has four electrical boxes on top of concrete slabs. There is a small bronze plaque set in limestone in the grass a few feet south of the north sidewalk.

f. EVALUATION: In order to be eligible for historic landmark designation, properties shall meet at least three (3) of the 16 criteria listed. The applicant submitted that the property meets the following criteria, consistent with UDC Sec. 35-607(b):

3. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the community, county, state, or nation; On August 12, 2004, in ordinance number 99551, presented by Malcolm Matthews, Director of Parks and Recreation, the city designates the Park as the Liz Davies Greenspace. The Beacon Hill Area Neighborhood Association newsletter states, "On Saturday, November 27, members of BHANA, The Conservation Society, and the Davies family gathered to name the green space at Michigan Avenue and Fredericksburg Road in honor and memory of Liz Davies, a long-time city and neighborhood activist." The Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) describes on their website the Uptown Historic District and includes a specific description of the park, stating, "The collection of buildings provides a unity of style around the little park. The park is called the Liz Davies Greenspace and was planted by the owners of 1241 W. French Place. It is dedicated to Liz Davies, the first president of the Beacon Hill Neighborhood Association and a former San Antonio Conservation Society President." The owners of 1241 W. French Place, who orchestrated the community planting and continued to preserve and maintain the park are artists Angel Rodríguez-Díaz and Rolando Briseño, two important artists who have made significant contributions to the arts both on a local and national scale.

7. Its unique location or singular physical characteristics that make it an established or familiar visual feature; As the City of San Antonio developed the area north of the city center in the early 20th century, it determined this particular location should remain a green space and be designated a park. Before the Progressive Era, the city subdivided land, including creeks, woods, and natural features, into a grid pattern to sell off as individual lots. The city began to realize the social and environmental consequences of blind development, along with the rest of the country. During the Progressive Era—a period of reform in the United States between the 1890s and 1920s—city planners began to rethink urbanization and how they would integrate nature into the expanding neighborhoods of major cities to address social and environmental issues. On June 23, 1919, City of San Antonio passed ordinance number 117 "Authorizing the purchase of lot No. 1 and the west part of lot No. 2, in the City Block No. 3030..." Further stating, "it is necessary for the City of San Antonio to acquire for street and Park purposes." This park was developed as part of a national movement to address the need for green spaces and address issues of density and development. It was determined that this exact parcel of land would be designated a green space at the crest of the hill between San Pedro Creek and Martinez Creek transversed by Fredericksburg Road. The Liz Davies Greenspace is an example of the Progressive Movement and its influence on urban planning. These efforts should be preserved as a historic park because of this unique location between the creeks.

13. It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif; The collection of buildings that OHP refers to (in the quote under the answer to criteria number 3) includes two buildings that frame the Liz Davies Greenspace. The park is integral to the historic design of these two structures as a commercial plaza open to Fredericksburg Road. The project was developed by the Beacon Hill Company and designed by Morris, Noonan & Wilson, representing a successful realization of the Progressive Era to combine roads, green space, and business centers into a healthy green city. After the land was purchased by the city in 1919 and designated a park, the architect designed these two structures to serve as facades for both the buildings and the park, using the architecture to expand the boundaries of the park. As the buildings could be viewed from Fredericksburg Road, this design turned the park into a plaza, creating more of a presence and gateway into the neighborhood. As a result, there is a mutual relationship between the park and the buildings and they should be viewed as one cohesive development. If we were to lose the park, the integrity of the buildings would be lost, and vice versa. In addition, the Liz Davies Greenspace contributes to the overall character of the area. As the city marked this piece of land at the top hill for a park, it resulted in the commercial expansion of the area with St Ann's Catholic Church, Beacon Hill Elementary School, and surrounding businesses. Historically, this is common practice to combine civic, commercial, educational, and religious buildings at the top of a hill. And the roads—in this case Fredericksburg Road—connect the residences that often live in the valleys, giving way to a strong commercial node for community engagement. The Liz Davies Greenspace is a historic marker of the overall development of the area and continues to provide a physical anchor connecting the community.

Staff evaluated the structure against all 16 criteria and determined that it was consistent with UDC sec. 35-607(b):

1. Its value as a visible or archeological reminder of the cultural heritage of the community, or national event; the site is a visible reminder of the Good Roads movement to expand and improve the nation's highways, and the influence of the Progressive Movement on urban planning. Its location and distinctive shape contribute to the streetscape's sense of place by creating both a natural respite for pedestrians and additional parking for this dense commercial corridor.

6. Its historical, architectural or cultural character as a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian structure, including, but not limited to, bridges, acequias, gas stations, transportation shelters, or other commercial structures; as pedestrian infrastructure along the urban streetscape of the Old Spanish Trail, including landscaping elements such as stone planters, shade trees, and sidewalks, which are unique to this portion of Fredericksburg Road stretching from the Uptown neighborhood to roughly Hildebrand.

13. It bears an important and significant relationship to other distinctive structures, sites, or areas, either as an important collection of properties or architectural style or craftsmanship with few intrusions, or by contributing to the overall character of the area according to the plan based on architectural, historic or cultural motif; the greenspace was part of the original design of the neighborhood developed by the Beacon Hill Company, and is located within an area identified by OHP staff as an eligible historic district.

Staff found that the evidence submitted by the applicant supported criteria 1 and 6 but did not sufficiently support criteria 3 or 7.

g. The Public Works Department is currently managing a 2017 Bond project for improvements to the Liz Davies Greenspace. Regardless of the outcome of this case, this project will be reviewed by the HDRC because it is City property.

h. Per UDC Sec. 35-453, once the Commission makes a recommendation for designation, property owners must receive a written approval (a Certificate of Appropriateness) for any exterior work until the City Council makes their final decision.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff agrees with the applicant that the property is eligible for local historic landmark designation and recommends that the Historic and Design Review Commission issue a Finding of Historic Significance for 726 Fredericksburg Rd and recommend that City Council initiate the rezoning process based on findings a through f.

COMMISSION ACTION:

Approved as submitted.



Shanon Shea Miller
Historic Preservation Officer