

ALLIANCE FOR SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS

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Via email

OPEN LETTER TO THE ZONING COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

Dear City of San Antonio Zoning Commission Members,

This letter introduces the Alliance for San Antonio Missions, a group of neighbors who live and work in the local communities around the four San Antonio Missions on the City's south side.

We are proud that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently designated the San Antonio Missions a World Heritage site, and we thank you for your important role in securing the designation. We welcome the increased attention that accompanies World Heritage designation, because we understand and appreciate the unique history of the Missions, and their special relationship of built and natural environments. We believe this designation raises awareness of the responsibility to preserve this heritage, for everyone.

The fact is that these global cultural treasures have long been a center of local community life on the Southside. Indeed, World Heritage designation was awarded

primarily in recognition of the 'interweaving of cultures' represented by the Missions, and their crucial connection to the San Antonio River Basin.

This is why the Alliance has been formed. Our group includes long-time and newer residents and business owners as well as members of area neighborhood associations and community organizations, all of whom have come together specifically over common concerns with and hopes for proposals for development in our areas.

We seek to identify consensus while sharpening the understanding of the differences among the existing neighborhoods in the Missions area. The Alliance is organized to be an amplifying voice for our communities. We work collaboratively, as a committee. Our communications are facilitated by a Secretary, a position that rotates among the group.

In an effort to **open a positive, constructive and more public conversation about smart, sustainable development in our communities**, we are reaching out to you and other elected representatives and government agencies, as well as others who have a stake in the preservation and future of the Missions and their environs. At the moment, we do not believe that our local communities have an adequate voice or representation in discussions and decision-making about planning that affects us, first, most directly.

We would like to share our immediate concerns and goals with you:

1) Information. The Alliance is working to help better inform our communities about the many City and other governmental rules, regulations and current policies that are relevant to development around the Missions. For many months now, we have been told that a series of public conversations would be organized via City Council District 3. We welcome any such conversations and would be happy to participate in helping to organize and promote them. Meanwhile, we have begun our own series of community roundtables and other informational events and hope that you will all consider joining us. While development around the Missions comes with special challenges, all San Antonio communities face many of the same problems – and we all wish our city to rise, together. We would be honored to hear from you directly about the problems and opportunities your particular zoning districts are encountering, and we invite you to present your vision for how development around the Missions fits in to the larger picture of our City's growth and evolution. Green spaces, traffic, neighborhood economic growth and cultural sustainability... will you please share your insights with us?

2) Community Preservation. We are calling for the City of San Antonio to revisit its existing guidelines and policies in connection with development *around* the Southside Missions. As a starting point, we think that the Mission Protection Overlay Districts need to be revised with substantial local community involvement. Until that is done, we think

that development and re-zoning activity around the Missions should be delayed.


3) Representation. We believe that the Southside Missions area could benefit from the establishment of something like a 'Missions Community Impact District', which would go beyond considering scenic views to grapple with the greater challenges of urban development in this new context of World Heritage designated sites. We have called on the Mayor to convene such an advisory committee, and have requested that our group, as well as the other affected neighborhood associations and community organizations, be invited to participate substantively.

We are also wondering when a Zoning Commissioner for District 3 will be appointed.

We understand the parameters of your role as members of the Zoning Commission, and appreciate your service to the City. However, in light of the City's enormous investment in securing World Heritage designation for the San Antonio Missions, and the increased media attention, tourist traffic and pressure for development that the designation has already brought, we believe that this is an urgent subject.

We therefore would appreciate the opportunity for the kind of conversation that cannot happen in the few minutes afforded at regular Zoning Commission meetings for statements from citizens. Are you willing to meet with us?

Sincerely,


Margaret Johnson
Secretary
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cc: Veronica Hernandez <veronica.hernandez@sanantonio.gov>