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December 6, 2023

President Jay Hartzell
110 Inner Campus Drive
Stop G3400
Austin, TX 78712-3400

RE: University Junior High/Steve Hicks School of Social Work Building

Dear President Hartzell,

[Preservation Austin](#) exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write today to express our concern about the possibility of losing the Steve Hicks School of Social Work building for new football practice facilities. Formerly home to the historically significant University Junior High, the building is an extremely valuable asset that tells a distinct and hopeful story of Austin's racial past that we believe must be preserved. Our concern for the future of this building is in alignment with our Underrepresented Heritage [Advocacy Priority](#), which seeks to tell the full story of Austin's diverse history and advocate for saving and interpreting the sites that tell that reflect that history. We join the grassroots efforts growing around this building's preservation in imploring the University to preserve University Junior High and take leadership as stewards of its own history.

Listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#) in 2001, University Junior High was established in 1933 as a collaborative effort between The University of Texas at Austin and the Austin Public School System. The laboratory school served a dual purpose, benefiting the University as a facility for future teachers to test new methodologies as well as accommodating Austin's growing school-age population. Most importantly, in 1957, University Junior High became the first racially integrated public school in Austin following the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. University Junior High modeled the success of integration and paved the way for the eventual demise of Austin's segregated school system.

In addition to this important historic association, the building is also home to the work of celebrated Austin muralist Raul Valdez. His piece "Heart & Soul" was commissioned by the School of Social Work in the mid-1990s, depicting his artistic vision for the school's mission of repair and social justice.

The demolition of this building would represent an absolute loss for UT's history. This includes the history of the designers, craftsmen, and laborers who shaped this monumental building; the histories of the countless children and students who learned here and applied that knowledge to

build a better Austin; and the powerful history of desegregation that transpired within its walls. We strongly believe that the University should take pride in the stewardship of these legacies and consider deeply what the loss of this building would represent. The University of Texas at Austin has amazing resources dedicated to its athletic programs, and we recognize the priority that they enjoy on the campus. We call on the University to grant similar priority to its historic legacy.

Preservation Austin is happy to serve the University as a resource on this and all other campus preservation issues. To set up a meeting to discuss this further, please reach out to Policy & Outreach Planner Meghan King at meghan@preservationaustin.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa A. Barry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter "y".

Melissa Barry, President