

Jon T. Hansen
Chairman
Texas Historical Commission
1029 Los Jardines
El Paso, Texas 79912

November 25, 2009

Chairman Hansen,

It has come to our attention that the Executive Committee heard a presentation by the State Preservation Board at the El Paso Quarterly Commission meeting describing a preferred option of a new addition for the Governors Mansion. We are writing to express our objection to any addition to the north of the Governor's Mansion.

The Mansion is the oldest Governor's Mansion west of the Mississippi. The last addition was made in 1914 and did not alter the silhouette of the building. That addition was accomplished in such a manner as to not be seen from the front approach of the Mansion. This is the kind of sensitivity to this unique historic design that we believe should be maintained during the restoration.

Such an addition would irrevocably alter the view the public has historically had from the Capitol. Generations of Texans have approached the Mansion from the Capitol and future Texans should be able to see the same view. The plan would destroy a magnificent Live Oak tree of approximately a diameter of three feet, further altering this historic view.

The historic circulation pattern of the north grounds would be significantly altered. Many visitors to the Mansion have been able to walk around the grounds in the same way, but would be unable to if the Commission allows this addition to go forward.

We believe that the Mansion can be restored to its historic nature while accommodating many of the current expressed needs and other internal changes that may need to be made. Many Governors have lived with their families in the Mansion and have not attempted to alter its historic form as does the proposed plan. We believe that anyone who runs for Governor should accept this House of the People on the same terms that other Governors have. It should be an honor to be elected and live there and become a part of the continuity of the governorship, regardless of whether it is an ideal dwelling for a specific temporary occupant.

Finally, the preferred option would set a precedent that would cripple the credibility and haunt the Texas Historical Commission for years as it undermines the statutory and moral authority used particularly to manage and provide stewardship for State Archeological Landmarks and courthouse restorations. The Texas Historical Commission has become one of the most credible and respected agencies in Texas. That credibility was earned over the years during our terms as Commissioners due to a lot of hard work and exceptionally strong leadership. We fear that the Commission would not be able to

pursue accurate historic restorations of any type if the precedent promoted by the State Preservation Board is approved.

Historic restorations are often complex and difficult, but a commitment to the mission of the Texas Historical Commission demands our patience and creativity to find solutions that do not significantly alter one of the most important structures in Texas history. We believe that our constituency is and always will be the past and future generations of Texans whom we serve and not a current circumstance.

Accordingly, we ask that you not approve or cause to be approved the current option of an addition to the north. The Commission has a statutory responsibility to the citizens of Texas, and we ask that you strongly urge the State Preservation board to find an acceptable alternative that does not alter the silhouette of the Mansion.

We also request that you forward our letter immediately to the current Commissioners serving on the Texas Historical Commission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Gail Loving Barnes, Odessa (1999-2005)
Jane Cook Barnhill, Brenham(1995-2007)
Shirley Caldwell, Albany (1995-2007)
Lareatha Clay, Dallas (2001-2007)
Jean Ann Ables Flatt (1999-2005)
Frank Gorman, El Paso (1996-2007)
Albert Hausser, San Antonio (2003-2009)
Dr. Eileen Johnson, Lubbock (1997-2005)
Juan Sandoval, El Paso (1999-2005)
Linda Valdez, Rockport (1997-2003)