

Austin Independent School District

Office of the General Counsel



To: Marc Ott, City Manager
City of Austin

From: Ylise Janssen, General Counsel
Austin ISD



Cc: Steve Sadowsky, Historic Preservation Officer for the City of Austin
Jacob Reach, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Austin ISD

Date: June 22, 2016

Re: Lee Elementary School Name Change

As you may be aware, the Austin ISD Board of Trustees recently voted on May 23, 2016 to change the name of Robert E. Lee Elementary to Russell Lee Elementary. The Board of Trustees has been considering a name change for quite some time and voted to initiate the name change process on March 28, 2016 at its regularly scheduled meeting. As part of the process, community members voiced support for and opposition to the name change.

Concurrently, a group of citizens opposing the name change requested that the Historic Landmark Commission consider the initiation of a historic zoning case for Lee Elementary, which would require any alteration to the exterior of the building to be first approved by the Commission. In response to correspondence sent from my office on March 28, 2016, the Commission postponed any action on initiating a zoning case. At the Commission's April 25th and May 26th meetings, the Historic Landmark Commission again postponed any formal action initiating a zoning case for Lee Elementary. Citizens seeking the initiation of a zoning case offered that the building's art deco lettering and architectural design elements should be preserved. At the April 25th Commission meeting, Austin ISD's staff attorney assured that any changes to the exterior signage located on the building would conform to the original architectural design elements. Additionally, Austin ISD agreed to work with the City through Ms. Steve Sadowsky, Historic Preservation Officer, to ensure adherence to the school's historic characteristics.

Austin ISD representatives, including myself, met with Mr. Sadowsky on June 8, 2016 to discuss the plans moving forward. Currently, the Austin ISD has removed the copper lettering from the exterior of the building. The District is in the process of securing a manufacturer who will clean and restore the lettering that will be reinstalled and fabricating matching letters so that "Russell" may replace "Robert." The District and Mr. Sadowsky agreed that no existing historic plaques will be removed from the building. Instead, an additional sign commemorating the name change

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of the building may be added. The District is confident that any and all changes to the signage will not disrupt the historic nature of the building. If the initiation of a historic zoning case is considered again, Mr. Sadowsky will notify Austin ISD so that appropriate school administrators and/or elected officials will be included in Historic Landmark Commission discussions.