

July 21, 2011

Senator Jose Rodríguez, Texas State Senator, District 29
P.O. Box 12068
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Senator Rodríguez,

This letter requests your assistance in saving Lincoln Park Recreation Center located at 4001 Durazno Street at Lincoln Park, from its proposed demolition and also asks that it be re-opened to be used by the Lincoln Park Community. The building is owned by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and is leased to the City of El Paso.

Bordered by Concordia Cemetery to the North, the Ziegler Union Stockyards to the West, Lincoln Park, was a flourishing community comprised of mostly adobe buildings as early as the late 1800's. The Lincoln Park addition was filed with the City of El Paso in 1909 and in 1912 Lincoln School was built. Lincoln Park was a multicultural community that included a Baptist Church. According to Rebecca Valdez Sterling, whose family moved there in the 1950s: "the community had Hispanics, African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Germans."

Before Lincoln was turned into a Recreation Center, it operated as a school for many years. Many noted El Pasoans attended school there, like Noland Richardson, as well as hundreds of Jefferson High School Alumni like Artist Antonio "Tony" Piña. In 1966, it was sold by the city to TxDOT, who leased it to the City of El Paso, who opened a community center in 1977. Several City offices, like the Aquatics Department and later groups like LULAC Project Admistad were formerly housed at the Lincoln Cultural Arts Center that included an art gallery that began exhibiting local artists in 1981. Rosa Guerrero, artist, educator, dance historian, and humanitarian founded her Folklorico group at Lincoln Center.

The Lincoln Park Recreation Center is one of last public structures of the large community that once lived there before urbanization projects like the creation of I-10 and the creation of the Spaghetti Bowl and the road to the U.S. Port of Entry, forever divided the community. Interstate 10 came through the community in 1966 and it is estimated that over 2,000 properties were affected.

The plans for Lincoln Park were drawn up by Nestor Valencia, then the director with the City of El Paso Planning Department in 1972. Aside from various homes, the Lincoln Cultural Arts Center is the last remaining public structure of the community that once lived there. Before the creation of Interstate 10, the area around Lincoln Park was a vibrant community at the site of the present-day Spaghetti Bowl. Lincoln Park, was also the home of a rock church formerly known as *El Calvario* Catholic Church (formerly located on Martinez Street that was built in 1933) that was knocked down to make room for a highway pillar.

The exterior walls of Lincoln Center contain murals by Carlos Flores who attended *La Academia de San Carlos*. *La Academia de San Carlos* in Mexico City is the first major art academy and the first art museum in the Americas. This is the same university that famed Mexican artists like Saturnino Herrán, Roberto Montenegro, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco attended. You heard that Flores was a student of Luis Nishisawa. That Nishizawa is recognized as one of Mexico's leading landscape artists of the 20th century. This would be like tearing down a building with Tom Lea murals in it.

The Lincoln Center Gallery was also the site of the first Juntos Art Exhibit that we organized in 1985 that included artists from El Paso and from Cd. Juárez, and such well-known artists such as the late Manuel Acosta, the late Marta Arat, the late Luis Jimenez Jr., and the late Rudy Montoya, as well as other artists, such as Paul H. Ramirez, who have gone on to have successful careers.

Artist/Muralist Felipe Adame painted a Virgen de Guadalupe in 1981 on the pillar that was built where *El Calvario* once stood. In 2005, Artist Carlos Callejo received \$5,000 from the City Arts Council to paint murals under the Spaghetti Bowl. They engaged in research with the community and painted 70 murals. In 2006-07, Lincoln Park starting hosting the annual Lincoln Park Day and in 2009 the Lincoln Park Conservation Committee was founded. In 2009, Artist Gabriel S. Gaytán painted his first mural at Lincoln Park titled: “El Corazón de El Paso,” on a 30’ x 20’ T shape freeway column. In 2010, the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association was created and it also received a Partners-in-Park designation that allows the association to sponsor up to four events per year in the park. Every September, the Lincoln Park Conservation Committee sponsors Lincoln Park Day that attracts local and out-of-state car clubs and is attended by thousands of people.

Lincoln Park is the site of a dynamic working relationship of the Lincoln Neighborhood Association with the Lincoln Park community in sponsoring the annual Lincoln Park Day and working with the community to advocate for their needs. There are 175 households and several businesses, as well as various members from throughout the city, that are represented by the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association. We thank you for your attention on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Miguel Juárez, MLS, Historian
For the Lincoln Park Conservation Committee (LPCC)
For the Lincoln Park Neighborhood Association
El Paso, Texas