



**PETE BINION,
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PUBLIC WORKS
CITY OF SAN MARCOS**

March 1, 2023
Ms. Diana Maxwell
National Trust for Historic Preservation
600 14th Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005

Ms. Maxwell,

Please see the historical narrative of the Dunbar School Home Economics Building and summary of intent. We look forward to working with you on the proposed use of National Trust funds should the city be granted the opportunity of their use for this project.

Historical Narrative:

The Dunbar Historic District encompasses a relatively small area in San Marcos but is part of a historically African American neighborhood that developed in the late nineteenth century, characterized by modest vernacular homes from the early twentieth century and more recent non-historic age development. The area around Dunbar neighborhood, once known as "Colored Town", eventually took the name of the Dunbar School which, itself was named in honor of Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906), the noted novelist and poet. Initially settled by Anglo farmers, Dunbar eventually became a predominantly Black neighborhood likely prompted by African Americans hired after the Civil War as hired hands or tenant farmers. The neighborhood grew in response to its proximity to the more affluent neighborhoods nearby; many of the early residents of Dunbar worked as domestic servants, cooks, and groundskeepers. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the thriving African American community included numerous stores and restaurants. A 1906 Sanborn map even identified a "Negro Skating Rink" at the corner of Fredericksburg and Comal (present-day MLK Drive). The main commercial area, known as "The Beat", developed along today's MLK Drive east of Guadalupe Street. Over the years the neighborhood has lost a great deal of historic character which led to the establishment of the local Dunbar Historic District. The history of this area is not well-documented in conventional sources and therefore, would be considered an underrepresented community. Despite the changes

the neighborhood, it remains crucial in documenting and preserving the history of African Americans in San Marcos.

The Dunbar School Building, while not located within the Dunbar Historic District, was designated as a local historic landmark in 2004. In 1890, the City of San Marcos appropriated \$8,000 to build a brick school for white children on the Woods Street school site, the present location of the UCM Wesley building. The old wooden school building was moved to Centre Street, next to the African Methodist Church, and repaired for use as the Negro School. The school had homemade benches, a teacher's table, and a few other furnishings. In 1918, the school board - under Ed J. L. Green as President - purchased a tract of land on Comal (now MLK Drive) and Endicott Streets. The school building was relocated there, and another large room added. Integration of schools was mandated in 1954, and the San Marcos school system started by combining the 1955 Senior classes of the two high schools. One grade was added each year until integration was complete. Referred to as "the colored school" until 1961, the building was officially named Dunbar Elementary School by the San Marcos Independent School District Board of Trustees. The City of San Marcos purchased the property in 1973 with money donated by Mr. and Mrs. C.D. Marshall, under the stipulation that the property be used only for a public park. A multi-use community building, the Dunbar Recreation Center, and recreation equipment were added to the site in later years. This building is all that remains of the original school following a fire in 1986; it is often referred to as the Dunbar School Home Economics Building.

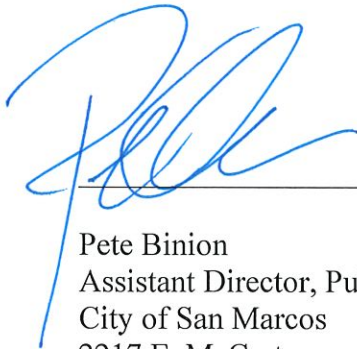
In 2021/2022, the city was awarded an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the National Park Service along with a Certified Local Government Grant from the Texas Historical Commission to designate the Dunbar School Home Economics Building on the National Register of Historic Places. This project is underway with a projected designation on the National Register in early 2024. This project will support the Department of the Interior's priority of "Restoring trust with local communities." It is unfortunate that the history of certain communities, such as the African American community of the Dunbar neighborhood, have been underrepresented. This does not mean that their history is less than. Following the social reform issues that began in 2020, one can see that a shift in preservation to include intangible heritage along with the tangible is beginning to take shape. Preservation should not be solely viewed through the lens of architecture. Culture is just as valuable to preserve. Without the stories of the past, the generations of today and the future cannot have a complete picture. It is the tangible and intangible that lend to the sense of place. When a community can point to places that are on the Register and which still exist, the sense of pride in a place swells. That pride is carried through the generations and is what helps restore trust among community members. The buildings of the Dunbar neighborhood deserve to have their voices heard and be recognized at the national level. Appropriate restoration of the Dunbar School Home Economics Building will go a long way to restore the trust within our local African American community.

Summary of Intent:

The City of San Marcos has already begun the process to preserve this building. Future use of the building will be determined via a public participation process which will ensure the final use of the building is in line with the vision of the community. An informational meeting to provide the public with an introduction to this project and a chance for the public to provide comments and input is scheduled for April 13, 2023.

The City respectfully requests permission by the National Trust to reallocate the awarded 2018 grant funds to support this project. We believe this project meets the intent of the grant funds by continuing the preservation and legacy of this historic building.

Attached to this correspondence are project documents to include Architectural design for stabilization, quote for public outreach plan and quote for building stabilization.



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ATTACHMENTS:

9105 DUNBAR 100%
2023-02-08 CITY OF SAN MARCOS DUNBAR PROJECT MOVING-FOUNDATION
DUNBARHOMEEC_PROJECT SCHEDULE

CC:

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