

**LAVACA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION**  
*Proudly Serving San Antonio's Oldest Residential Neighborhood*  
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October 23, 2020

Tim Alcott  
Chief Legal and Real Estate Officer  
San Antonio House Authority  
818 S. Flores St.  
San Antonio, Texas 78204

Re: SAHA/Catellus Development of Victoria Commons

Dear Mr. Alcott:

The Lavaca Neighborhood Association supports the mission of SAHA and respectfully requests the following concerns be given deep consideration

**1. Requested Zoning Change**

Currently, the entire Victoria Commons site is zoned "IDZ." What is SAHA's rationale for requesting IDZ-3 zoning instead?

**2. Limited Useable Park Space**

Bexar County has great health disparities reflecting disparities in socioeconomic status across zip code. From the 2019 [Bexar County Community Health Needs Assessment](#), a resident of District 1 or 3 has a life expectancy almost 20 years less than a resident of the northside. Access to park space is linked to public health outcomes and is an essential component of [health equity](#). While the demographics of Lavaca have changed in the last decade, Lavaca is predominantly a working class neighborhood, with significant health disparities. In 2010, [SA2020](#) set a goal of increasing walkable access to parks by 50%. [SAHA's Mission](#) is to "improve lives and resident independence." Improving lives means improving health outcomes, which is impacted by access to parks.

The proposed plan would remove up to 20% of Labor Street Park, the only park located within Lavaca. Labor Street Park's open spaces are vital to the Lavaca community, allowing for neighborhood picnics and other gatherings, softball and kickball games, and much more. The basketball courts in particular are heavily utilized, providing much needed physical activity to all residents of Lavaca, especially the families living in Refugio and Hemisview apartments. Replacing even 20% of the park space with housing will have a negative impact on the health and wellness of Lavaca residents and is contrary to SAHA's mission to integrate affordable housing "into the fabric of the neighborhood." The irregular green spaces behind the proposed apartments

along the highway and the highly landscaped grassy walkways between the buildings are not sufficient substitutes for a centrally-located and accessible neighborhood park.

The LNA appreciates SAHA's suggestion to relocate the basketball courts. However, it is imperative that such a plan be included in the proposed designs prior to further approvals.

**The LNA requests that the current square footage of Labor Street Park be maintained.**

### **3. Traffic Patterns and Dangerous Intersection at Cesar Chavez and Labor St.**

The current ingress and egress to Victoria Commons and surrounding areas is very limited. The present intersection at Cesar Chavez and Labor Streets is mis-aligned and hazardous, a problem which will only worsen with the traffic generated by the 100 Labor Street development, the proposed reopening of the Burnet campus, and the increased density from the Artisan Park build-out.

**In discussions with the City of San Antonio District 1 office, it was recommended that SAHA work with COSA, the Hemisfair Park Area Redevelopment Corporation (HPARC), UTSA (owners of the Institute of Texan Cultures), and SAISD to reconfigure the Labor St./ Cesar Chavez intersection as part of the Victoria Commons development plan.**

### **4. Affordable Childcare Center**

Included in [SAHA's strategic plan](#) Goals 1 and 4:

- *Ensure that families have access to the resources they need to improve their lives and the lives of their children*
- *Ensure new communities provide access to childcare services, elderly activities, employment, education, and healthy living opportunities*

The proposed plan includes demolition of the YMCA Early Learning Center to build a multi-story building with up to 102 housing units. Access to affordable childcare is directly correlated with one's ability to work and is therefore an essential element of affordable housing. While the YMCA ELC serves only a small number of current SAHA residents, the facility serves as affordable childcare to many families in the neighborhood. While this portion of the property was not part of Resolution 5434 (see below), the LNA does not oppose demolition of this building.

**The LNA supports redevelopment into multi-story housing provided accommodations be made to relocate the YMCA ELC within the Victoria Commons development.**

### **5. Affordable Housing**

Included in SAHA's Strategic Plan Goal 4:

- *Expand the supply of affordable housing while being mindful of the specific needs of the San Antonio community*

Throughout the 130-year history of Lavaca, the community has been one of mixed income and affordability. Lavaca was home to the artisans and craftsmen who built the grand mansions of neighboring King William. Victoria Commons was once the [Baptist Settlement](#), home to many

Latino and Black residents who worked in the nearby Railroad depots and lumberyards before making way for Victoria Courts. Many Lavaca residents have lived in the community through multiple generations. While the median property values have increased dramatically, the Lavaca Neighborhood Association remains committed to the long-standing diversity of the community.

Furthermore, housing affordability is directly linked to [transportation](#). If workers cannot live in close proximity to their workplace, their overall housing costs become less affordable, even with rent subsidies. Currently, 45% of Victoria Commons housing units qualify as “affordable.” This includes the 9-story Victoria Plaza to reopen soon which will be limited to elderly and disabled residents. While there will be an increase in housing units overall, the proposal calls for a decrease in the proportion of affordable units to 39%.

**To better serve the specific needs of the San Antonio community, the Lavaca Neighborhood Association recommends maintaining 45% affordable housing units to be distributed throughout Victoria Commons.**

## **6. Density and Infrastructure**

While the LNA recognizes the importance of increased density in the urban core, the Victoria Commons Phase II plan calls for a 42% increase in density. Much of that (380 units) will be concentrated in the retention ponds currently used for drainage. However, no plan detailing how these drainage issues will be addressed was provided. The LNA cannot support building over the retention ponds until the engineering reports have been shared.

This area of Victoria Commons already has very limited egress and ingress. The current street pattern simply cannot withstand the addition of 380 housing units without a significant change in street design to allow for more efficient ingress and egress. The original plan presented in 2014 included townhomes only in the Phase 2B with no building in the retention ponds.

**The LNA recommends:**

- **Presentation of engineering plans to account for drainage**
- **North and South Pond developments be limited to three story buildings with fewer units assuming approval of drainage plan.**

## **7. Administration Building**

On September 19, 2014, then president and CEO of SAHA, Lourdes Castro Ramirez and Tim Alcott, Development Services and Neighborhood Redevelopment Officer signed Resolution 5434 which stated:

### **“Phase V**

Victoria Courts Administration Building & City Park: Although the VC Administration Building is not eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, *because of its local significance to community stakeholders, SAHA has agreed not to demolish the building and instead to rehabilitate it.* SAHA’s plans include:

- Rehabilitating the existing 10,000 square-foot structure into a neighborhood community/cultural arts center.
- The Concept design was completed by Alamo Architects and Franklin Development
- Upon HUD SAC disposition approval, the adjacent 1.95-acre parcel will be provided to the City of San Antonio for a City Park in exchange for the current one-acre Victoria Park on Cesar Chavez.
- The park amenities will include walking trail, exercise stations, children’s play area, multipurpose court, and dog park.”

**The LNA recommends SAHA adhere to the commitments made in Resolution 5434 to not demolish the VC Administration building.**

The LNA looks forward to further discussions to address these concerns.

Respectfully,

The Lavaca Neighborhood Association Board

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