Proposal to the XXXXXXXXXXXX Foundation
Campaign for
San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site
November 20, 2017

The Friends of the Texas Historical Commission (FTHC) respectfully requests a grant of $XXXXXXX from the XXXXXXXXXXXX Foundation to support the development of the new San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site Museum, including the development and installation of the educational and interpretive exhibits that are part of the museum’s overall interpretive plan. The following proposal outlines the details of the museum project and interpretive exhibits, which will be integral to telling the full story of this historic town, and its significance in the history of Texas.

History of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission
Founded in 1953, the Texas Historical Commission (THC) preserves “real places telling real stories” of Texas history. Founded in 1996 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission (FTHC) was established to support THC’s efforts to identify, research, document, and promote the cultural heritage of Texas by developing and securing private resources to assist the Commission in establishing a lasting legacy.

The Friends of the THC secure private funding support for THC projects not provided for in the state budget. Special emphasis is placed on building public-private partnerships for capital support, and for empowering community-based preservationists through education, training, consultation, and professional support.

Over the past two decades, FTHC has helped secure more than $12 million to support THC projects and programs, including the excavation of the 17th century La Belle shipwreck in Matagorda Bay, the Fort St. Louis excavation, the Red River War Battle Sites Project, excavation of Bernardo Plantation, Texas in the Civil War and World War II Initiatives, the THC Preservation Scholars program, the Texas Archeology Stewardship Network, the Texas Courthouse Stewardship Program, Historic Cemeteries Program, Texas Archeological Stewardship Network program, the restoration of the Fulton Mansion, educational programs to train volunteer preservationists around the state, restoration of 23 historic Texas flags, the First Lady’s Texas Treasures Main Street Award, and other recognition awards for excellence in Texas history and preservation.

FTHC’s vision is that every community in Texas has a culture that supports history and historic preservation, so that we may pro-actively protect, preserve and learn from our collective past. Our goal is that no part of Texas history is unprotected or untold. To that end, our organization builds philanthropic support for the Texas Historical Commission so that the Commission can:

❖ Preserve, protect, and promote historic resources for the use, education, and enjoyment of present and future generations;
❖ Tell the story of Texas through place-based educational opportunities;
❖ Increase visitation and enhance the visitor experience to historic locations across Texas; and
❖ Empower the current and future Texas preservation community by building capacity through technical education, training, and mentoring by THC experts.
**Description of the San Felipe de Austin Museum Project**

San Felipe de Austin, a town founded by Stephen F. Austin in 1823, played a pivotal role in events leading up to the Texas Revolution. Yet this story is not as well known or understood as others in the chronicles of Texas history, including the Alamo and San Jacinto. Texans and visitors to our state have traditionally viewed the revolution story through a narrow prism that focuses on the seven months of battle and political upheaval that began at Gonzales in October 1835, and culminated in victory on the San Jacinto battlefield in April 1836. However, the people and the series of events that set the revolution in motion were part of a larger and longer story – one that began in the early 1820s at the headquarters of *empresario* Stephen F. Austin’s colony, San Felipe de Austin.

From the first call to the “people of Texas” to convene in 1832, through the third “representative convention” three years later, San Felipe de Austin stood at the epicenter of the Texas Revolution. The story of this community is not only the story of Mexican Texas but also the vital missing piece in the larger chain of events that led to the rise of the Lone Star Nation. Residents of San Felipe shaped and participated in all of the events of the Revolution, directing actors and actions on the grand stage that led to the forging of the new nation.

To elevate public understanding and appreciation of the town’s history and significance in the history of Texas, the THC is implementing a detailed interpretive plan at the museum – including a series of interactive and static educational exhibits, educational audio and video content, outdoor interpretive panels, and a map plaza with a three-dimensional town-site model at the new San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site. These exhibits, focused on the site’s history and archeology, will not only provide educational and research resources, but will also play a critical role in telling the full story of the Texas Revolution.

The Friends of the Texas Historical Commission has launched a $12.56 million campaign for the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site Museum, and the State of Texas has already committed $7.49 million towards this project. **The Friends of the THC respectfully requests a grant of $300,000 from the XXXXXXXXXX Foundation to develop and implement the educational exhibits and related programming within the museum.**

**A Small Settlement with a Big Story**

For 500 years, Texas’ contemporary history was shaped by the arrival of Europeans in the New World. For three centuries, Spain ruled over the lands we call Texas today. In 1820, Moses Austin convinced the Spanish government that something heretofore not considered could change Texas for the better: an influx of emigrants to settle the *frontera* that missions and presidios had failed to tame. Moses Austin died before he was able to implement his plan, but his son Stephen F. Austin decided to finish what his father had begun – and with an *empresario’s* contract awarded by the newly formed Mexican government, Austin set out to find land for his colony.
In 1823, Stephen F. Austin, armed with land grant contracts with the Mexican government, brought 297 families (the “Old 300”) to settle in the rich river bottom between Brazos and Colorado Rivers, south of the El Camino Real. This new colony, known as San Felipe de Austin — near Sealy and approximately 50 miles west of Houston, and second only in size to San Antonio — became a bustling hub for commerce, government, and diplomacy and was the site of the state’s first land office, postal service, printing press, and schools. The town’s residents included hardscrabble pioneers, enterprising businessmen, surveyors, tavern shopkeepers, militiamen, and visionary revolutionaries. William B. Travis established his law practice there, and in local homes and taverns, colonists debated whether to rebel against the government of Mexico. Delegates from across the territory met in conventions in San Felipe in 1832, 1833, and 1835 to discuss grievances with Mexican policies.

After seeking peace between Mexico and the Texas settlers for as long as possible, Austin ultimately joined his fellow settlers in seeking independence for Texas. When the Alamo fell on March 6th, 1836, Sam Houston’s army retreated toward San Felipe. Houston ordered San Felipe de Austin’s residents to burn their town to the ground on March 29, 1836, and the town’s militia defended the river crossing against Santa Anna’s invading army, slowing them down. Weeks later, Texas independence was won at the Battle of San Jacinto.

While San Felipe de Austin’s prominence lasted only 13 years (1823-1836), nearly every significant character and event of this era of Texas history is connected to this frontier outpost.

Why San Felipe de Austin, and Why Now?

Texans are proud of their history, especially stories related to the Texas Revolution and independence. Many of these stories have attained a mythic status, shaping what it means to be a Texan. They resonate with proud native Texans and long-time residents as well as with newcomers embracing the Texas spirit.

For decades, however, the story of the birth of the Republic of Texas has been missing its central piece — San Felipe de Austin. Despite the town’s pivotal role in Texas’ “Road to the Revolution,” its story remains largely untold for several reasons:

❖ **The destruction of its physical structures.** As a result of the intentional burning of the town in 1836, none of its original structures remain. However, the Texas Historical Commission’s work over the last decade at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site continues to unearth vital links to the town’s history and its role in the Texas Revolution.

❖ **A lack of storytelling infrastructure.** Although the archeological research and excavations are revealing many artifacts and the town’s footprint continues to emerge, the existing infrastructure at the San Felipe de Austin site does not convey the complex stories of the town, the people who settled and inhabited it, or the spirit of freedom that destroyed it. These stories will be lost unless we can gather and record them, and effectively preserve and interpret them for educational and research purposes.

❖ **Inadequate visitor facilities.** The current State Historic Site, located in a pastoral setting along the I-10 Corridor between Houston and San Antonio, lacks the facilities needed to display the richness and significance of the San Felipe de Austin story. In its present state, the structures cannot reasonably accommodate more than the average annual visitor population of 7,000, but has the potential for many more if developed appropriately.
Although San Felipe de Austin existed for only 13 years (1823-1836), it had an enormous impact on Texas history. The new **San Felipe de Austin Museum**, with its state-of-the-art exhibits and interpretation, will allow the full history of the town and its significance in the Texas Revolution to be showcased in its entirety.

In recent years, archival and archeological research has revealed the rich history of San Felipe and its role in the Texas Revolution. **With the passing of time, these stories will fade from the memories of Texans unless we can gather them, record them, and house them in a location that is connected to the characters that inhabited these stories, and use them to educate current and future Texans.**

**The San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site Museum, Exhibits, and Programming**

Today, the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site occupies a 90-acre property that features a monument to Stephen F. Austin, a replica log cabin, and a small 1847 mercantile (“The J.J. Josey Store”) that serves as a temporary visitor center. The site is open year-round, and the visitor center is operated by the THC.

The new San Felipe de Austin Museum, **located near three major school districts, with an enrollment of 200,000+ students**, will offer an unprecedented opportunity to walk in the footprints of Texas’ founding characters. Through state-of-the-art interpretive exhibits and displays featuring archeological finds, the museum will allow students and visitors to experience their connections to this shared Texas story. The Museum will also provide exciting opportunities to bring stories of the many different ethnicities of San Felipe de Austin to life. Many cultures intersected in Mexican Texas, and San Felipe was ground zero for those multicultural engagements.

As one of the few mid-sized or larger Texas museums developed in the 21st century, **advanced technology will allow the museum to provide compelling and immersive experiences that engage students and visitors with the past.** At the same time, it will offer participatory experiences that allow students and visitors of all ages to share their insights and to ask questions. Experiences will be designed with today’s students in mind – focusing on a digital learning environment – and will include multimedia exhibits (e.g., touchscreen wall), interactive tabletop exhibits, and digital film media.

The site will also offer **public archeology experiences** where students and visitors can learn from “in-the-field” lectures presented by archeologists who will emphasize up-to-the-minute discoveries and share new information the moment it is uncovered. Educational programming for students will also include traditional lectures, intensive workshops that allow them to participate with the archaeological crew, context programs with archival and traditional stories about the real people associated with archaeological sites and artifacts. Additionally, **distance learning** will provide opportunities for interested supporters and far-away classrooms to tap into the knowledge and insights offered at the
site even when they are not there. Specifically, the new 10,000 square-foot museum, with its galleries, learning hall, interpretive spaces and amenities will include:

- **State-of-the-art interactive exhibits** focused on the history of the founding of the town.
- **A core exhibit** exploring Austin’s life and his roles in populating Texas and securing its independence, the story of the colony and its diverse people, and the complete story of the personalities and events that shaped the Texas Revolution.
- **Educational programs** available to 200,000+ students in the three independent school districts within 50 miles from San Felipe, including curriculum-aligned tours, interactive activities, continuing education, camps, and after-school programs that bring the history of San Felipe alive.
- **Outdoor interpretive exhibits** focused on stories of residents, archeology, exploration, and research.
- **Public archeology programs and research opportunities** for archeology and historic preservation students, archeologists, and others in academia.
- **A map plaza** that lays out the town as it stood in 1836, allowing visitors a glimpse at the physical elements of the town and life as it may have been almost 200 years ago.
- **Heritage tourism opportunities** related to site’s role as a gateway to the Texas Independence Trail.

**Population Benefited and Expected Impact**

The San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site is a destination for public and private school students, researchers of Texas history, heritage travelers following the Texas Independence Trail, visitors to the nearby Stephen F. Austin State Park, and history aficionados. While a significant number of the site’s visitors are from the Houston metro area, others come from across the state, the United States and beyond, to explore and learn about the story of the Texas Revolution.

In 2014, the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site had about 7,000 visitors – much lower than that at other Texas Revolution sites. The proposed development of a museum at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site has the potential to increase annual visitor-ship up to 70,000 or more in the next 2-3 years, with up to 20,000 4th and 7th grade students of Texas history visiting the site on educational trips. Web-based programming and digital media will also exponentially expand the reach of the site. With this anticipated increase in visitation as well as the outreach from the site through web-based programming, San Felipe de Austin will, over time, rival Revolution-related visitor traffic to both Washington-on-the-Brazos and San Jacinto.

**Leaders and Stakeholders**

In addition to being a historic site of statewide and national significance, the San Felipe de Austin Site enjoys strong support from several highly invested groups of stakeholders who will play important roles in the project and in the capital campaign. These stakeholder groups include the Texas Historical Commission, Friends of the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site, and the Descendants of the Old Three Hundred. In addition, the project enjoys the partnership and philanthropic support from several statewide and Houston area foundations. **Attachment 2**, with list of sources of support for the San Felipe de Austin State Museum is provided for your review.

**The Campaign for San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site**

With its mission to preserve and promote significant cultural resources on behalf of Texans, the THC is committed to realizing the tremendous historical potential of the San Felipe de Austin State Historic
The timing of this project is opportune, because San Felipe de Austin will celebrate the 200th anniversary of its founding in 2023, and Texas will celebrate its Bicentennial in 2036.

The total cost to design this state-of-the-art museum, and furnish and equip the space with quality educational exhibits is $12.56 million (please see Attachment 1, the San Felipe Museum project budget, for details). The State has already committed $7.49 million to support the project. In October 2016, the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission, guided by a campaign committee led by Honorary Co-Chair Senator Lois Kolkhorst, launched a capital campaign to fund the remainder of the project, which primarily includes the indoor exhibits and interpretation, as well as the town-site interpretative exhibits. Attachment 3, a list of the campaign committee members, as well as Attachment 4, a list of the board of directors of the Friends of the Texas Historical Commission are provided for your review.

To date, a total of $8.76 million has been committed to support the project (including state funding), leaving approximately $3.79 million to be raised. The construction and exhibit installation is expected to be completed by spring of 2018. THC has arranged interim financing so that donors may make their pledge payments over up to a three-year period if they so choose.

Once the museum is open to the public in April 2018, THC will fund the site’s annual operations through its biennial legislative appropriation, supplemented by public-private partnerships, efforts of local volunteers, and income from the endowment.

Selected renderings and a site plan are attached for your review.

Conclusion
The important stories of people and events at San Felipe de Austin are a missing piece of Texas’s past. Understanding what happened here will redefine the Texas Revolution story for generations of Texans and for future visitors to our great state. We hope the XXXXXXX Foundation will join us in bringing this important chapter of Texas history to life for future generations by supporting this campaign. We are deeply grateful for your consideration of our request.

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SAN FELIPE DE AUSTIN STATE HISTORIC SITE

SITE PLAN

FLOOR PLAN
EXTERIOR ELEVATION
EXTERIOR ELEVATION – WEST

San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site Museum:
Rendering of Front Elevation

San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site Museum:
Rendering of Map Plaza

LOG CABIN EXHIBIT (CONCEPTUAL RENDERING)
PRINTING EXHIBIT (CONCEPTUAL RENDERING)

“ALL THAT REMAINS” EXHIBIT – CONCLUDING EXHIBIT WITH ARCHEOLOGY DISPLAY