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West 6th St. Bridge Inducted Into National Register of Historic Places

Designation first step to restoration by local conservancy

AUSTIN, TEXAS – At a plaque dedication ceremony today on the bank of Austin’s Shoal Creek, the West 6th Street Bridge was revealed as the city’s latest inductee into the National Register of Historic Places. Originally nominated for induction in early 2014 by the Texas Historical Commission with the support of the Shoal Creek Conservancy, the designation is the result of a months-long deliberation by the National Parks Service, and kicks off restoration efforts for the bridge.

“The bridge is a remarkably engineered stone bridge that was designed to withstand heavy flooding in the 1880s.” says Charles Peveto, historian and Chair of the Conservancy’s Historic Bridges Committee. At 127 years old, the hand-built limestone structure is older than the State Capitol Building a few blocks away; its 80-foot-wide deck an innovation for the wagon era, providing room for 2-way traffic and, later, mule-drawn trolleys. “Few examples of stone bridges from this period in Texas still exist,” notes Peveto, “and to have one survive in the center of Austin is amazing.”

This W. 6th Street crossing is also the location of Austin’s first bridge. The original iron bowstring arch bridge and the current triple-arched stone one opened up west Austin for development and city expansion. For well over a century, this bridge has served as a major east-west artery for all modes of transport into and out of the downtown. Yet despite the thousands who traverse the bridge each day, its importance is often overlooked: the W. 6th Street Bridge is one of Austin’s most significant historical, architectural and engineering landmarks.

“The history of Austin can be told through the history along Shoal Creek,” says Joanna Wolaver, Executive Director of the Conservancy. “We want to promote these unique stories and create a series of special destinations that provide visitors opportunity to explore our history while enjoying the outdoors.” The W. 6th Street Bridge is the first such destination project for the Conservancy.

The vision for a fully restored bridge includes the addition of complimentary lighting, landscaping and place-making improvements. “This project is as much about restoring and preserving the bridge itself as making it a desired place to be,” notes Wolaver, who acknowledges induction into the Register as a critical first step. “Not only does [induction] provide national recognition of the bridge’s significance as a historic site worthy of preservation, but it also opens the door to additional funding opportunities.” The Conservancy is now seeking \$21,000 in public and private grants to match a donation from The Burdine Johnson Foundation to help complete the first phase of the restoration.

With the W. 6th Street Bridge joining the ranks of the National Register of Historic Places today, three bridges along Shoal Creek now have historic designation, and Peveto’s committee plans to pursue more, suggesting restored bridges can anchor the Shoal Creek trail. He adds, “By contributing character and interest to the surrounding natural beauty, restored bridges will enhance the trail system.”

The Shoal Creek Conservancy is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving Shoal Creek for all Austinites – present and future. To learn more, visit www.shoalcreekconservancy.org. High-resolution imagery of the W. 6th Street Bridge and architectural renderings of the restoration can be downloaded at <http://www.shoalcreekconservancy.org/bridges/>

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