



News Release

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Historic Addison African American Church Founded by Freed Slaves Blocked by City Council Zoning Decision

Neighbor complaints about church founded by freed slaves more than 150 years ago stall approval for zoning permits.

Addison, TX—First Liberty Institute and the law firm McDermott Will & Emery LLP submitted a demand letter today to the City Council of Addison urging officials to approve a zoning application for White Rock Chapel, a historic church founded by freed slaves. The chapel was designated a historic site by the Texas Historical Commission in 2000.

You can read the letter [here](#).

“It’s a shame that some residents in the neighborhood are opposing the church’s right to exist and aim to banish this historic landmark that symbolizes the freedoms granted to all Americans,” said Ryan Gardner, Counsel for First Liberty Institute. “The city should ignore the heckling of a handful of neighbors and allow this small, African American church to exemplify the core values of unity, diversity, and religious freedom that strengthen all communities.”

White Rock Chapel – founded by predominantly formerly enslaved men and women – purchased land and built the very first church out of rough-hewn logs near White Rock Creek following emancipation. In 1918, after enduring years of devastating flash floods, the congregation moved to higher ground at the current location. In August 2018, the current owners of White Rock Chapel purchased the property and brought it out of receivership. By doing so, they saved this historic church from demolition and preserved its rich history and legacy. They then sought building permits to restore the property. The city council denied the permits even after they were advanced by the city’s planning and zoning commission.

Today’s letter states, “The City’s denial deprives a historic church—founded almost 150 years ago by formerly enslaved men and women—of its right to religious exercise. More specifically, the City prevents the church from making essential improvements so that it can continue to exist as a place of worship. A small but influential group of opponents have fought—thus far successfully—to stop the church from doing so. But the law is clear. Opposition by a few, no matter how hostile or influential they are, cannot override the church’s right of religious exercise.”

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact John Manning at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.