Volume 2015 Article 153

2015

Archeological Survey Of Parmer Village Duplexes (Lot 4), Austin, Williamson County, Texas

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ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF PARMER VILLAGE DUPLEXES (LOT 4), AUSTIN, WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS

by

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LETTER REPORT NO. 904

submitted to

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PAI No. 214038

February 2015

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ABSTRACT

On December 4, 2014, an archeologist with Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey of a small property in northwest Austin in Williamson County, Texas. The work was performed for the proposed residential development of a 9.3-acre parcel of private property just west of Lake Creek at the intersection of Parmer Lane and Sage Grouse Drive. The field investigation was limited to the edges of the project area due to ongoing earthmoving and residential construction, which had extensively disturbed and reworked almost all of the parcel.

Surface survey identified a small amount of lithic debitage and burned rocks in the northwest corner of the project area and one ground stone fragment along its east edge. These artifacts are undoubtedly associated with previously recorded prehistoric archeological site 41WM585, which encompassed the current project area and adjoining lands to the west and southwest. This site has been subjected to extensive disturbance over the past 15 years, and the current investigations indicate that no intact archeological deposits are present in the project area. Hence, the site is considered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is recommended that the proposed project be allowed to proceed without additional archeological investigations.

CURATION

This survey was conducted under a no artifact collection policy. Identified artifacts were noted, briefly described, and returned to the point of recovery. Project records and photographs are housed at Prewitt and Associates, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

On December 4, 2014, an archeologist with Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey of a 9.3-acre parcel just west of Lake Creek, northwest of the intersection of Parmer Lane and Sage Grouse Drive in Austin in southwest Williamson County, Texas (see figure). The survey was performed for the proposed residential development of Parmer Village Duplexes Lot 4 to be conducted by Continental Homes of Texas, LP, on property owned by D. R. Horton. This work was performed in compliance with Section 106 and 36 CFR part 800 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The survey was conducted to check for unrecorded archeological resources and to evaluate the integrity of a portion of a previously recorded prehistoric archeological site (41WM585) that overlaps the project area. The 9.3-acre horizontal Area of Potential Effects (APE) has maximum dimensions of 670 ft on a side. Based on the characteristics of area soils, the estimated vertical APE is about 3 ft or less.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The project area is in the Balcones fault zone, which marks the physiographic transition between the Blackland Prairie to the east and the rugged, dissected landscape of limestone hills and canyons of the Edwards Plateau to the west. Topography in the project area is dominated by level to gently rolling uplands incised by easterly flowing tributaries (Bureau of Economic Geology 1997; Griffith et al. 2004; McMahan et al. 1984; Werchan and Coker 1983).

The project is on gently sloping upland terrain about 150 m northwest of an intermittent segment of Lake Creek that is inset into limestones and dolomites of the Lower Cretaceous–age Fredericksburg Group (Bureau of Economic Geology 1981; Fenneman 1938; Sellards et al. 1966). Eckrant extremely stony clay with 0–3 percent slopes is mapped across all but the southeast corner of the project area, which is depicted as Fairlie clay with 0–1 percent slopes (USDA-NRCS 2014a). Well-drained Eckrant series soils are very shallow and shallow to indurated limestone bedrock and interbedded quartz, chert, marl, and chalk. These soils are found on nearly level to very steep ridge summits, shoulders, and backslopes of dissected plateaus. Fairlie series soils are deep, moderately well drained soils found on nearly level to gently sloping uplands; these soils are prone to cracking when dry. Surface layers in Eckrant and Fairlie soils may vary from 10 to 50 cm thick (USDA-NRCS 2014b).

The climate of the eastern Edwards Plateau is classified as subtropical subhumid with hot summers and dry winters, whereas the climate of the Blackland Prairie physiographic unit is classified as modified humid subtropical with Gulf-influenced hot summers and continental-influenced mild winters (Goetze 1995; Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:10–12). The Williamson County climate is characterized by hot summers and typically cool winters punctuated by brief periods of cold arctic air. Seasonal temperature extremes exceeding 100ºF and dipping below 32ºF occur across the county but are more frequent on the Edwards Plateau (Werchan and Coker 1983:2–3). The mean annual precipitation

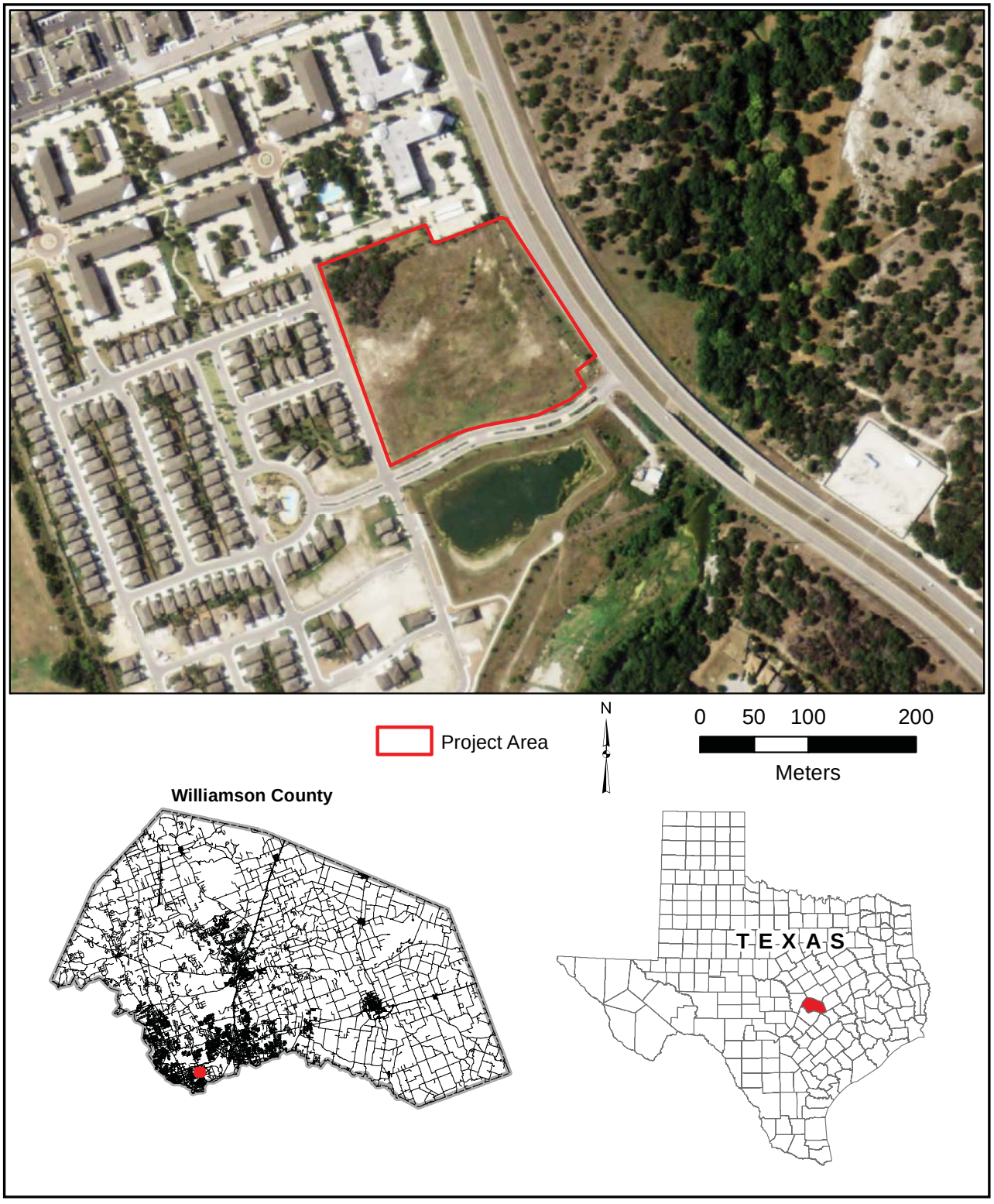

Figure. Project location map and modern aerial photograph showing the Area of Potential Effects.

for Williamson County is 34.5 inches (876 mm), with peaks in the early summer and fall months (Williamson County Weather 2014).

As with landscape and climate, the biota of Williamson County differs east to west with geographical overlap of some species. Flora and fauna of the Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie are defined as Balconian and Texan, respectively (Blair 1950). The project area is in the Balcones Canyonlands segment of the Edwards Plateau ecological region (Griffith et al. 2004), where mapped vegetative regimes include live oak-mesquite-ashe juniper parklands and live oak-ashe juniper woodlands (Frye et al. 1984). The climax plant community for the Eckrant soil series (and likely historically representative of the project area) consists of tallgrass savannah with scattered mottes of live oak (USDA-NRCS 2014b).

RESULTS OF THE FILE SEARCH

Review of the Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas revealed that there are four recorded prehistoric archeological sites (41WM585, 41WM589, 41WM591, and 41SM971) and two sites with both prehistoric and historic components (41WM494 and 41WM586) within 1 km of the project area. All of these sites have been extensively disturbed by infrastructure and residential development in the past 30 years.

Site 41WM494 was recorded by Espey, Huston and Associates, Inc., in 1982 and revisited twice two years later (Hubbard et al. 1984; site form submitted by John Clark of the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation). Covering approximately 200,000 m^2, it consisted of 18 burned rock middens and surrounding scatters of predominantly chipped stone artifacts along a limestone bench on the east side of Lake Creek, about 0.3 km southeast of the project area. Observed diagnostic artifacts indicate repeated occupation from the Early Archaic to Late Prehistoric periods; the historic component is tied to early-twentieth-century stone quarrying. The site has been impacted by looting since the 1950s, and it has been extensively disturbed by residential development.

Sites 41WM585, 41WM586, 41WM589, and 41WM591 were recorded during a survey conducted for North Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 (Hubbard et al. 1984). The current project area overlaps the eastern part of 41WM585, which consisted of a large (>200,000 m^2) sparse to dense scatter of chipped stone artifacts that included Early to Late Archaic period projectile points. Much of the site was extensively disturbed by the time it was recorded, and most of the site has since been destroyed. Site 41WM586 was a late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century homestead composed of a series of low water-control or agricultural features, a handful of late historic ceramics, and a possible historic grave on a Lake Creek tributary about 0.8 km southwest of the project area. A very small scatter of chipped stone artifacts is also included within the site boundary. Sites 41WM589 and 41WM591 were very sparse, variably-sized scatters of chipped stone artifacts recorded approximately 0.9 km southeast of the project area; both sites may represent southern extensions of 41WM494. Sites 41WM494 and 41WM586 are referenced during subsequent surveys of the Anderson Mill Road corridor by Hubbard (1984) and the Texas Department of Transportation (1996). The latter was conducted prior to proposed road and right-of-way expansion.

Site 41WM971 is a small scatter of chipped stone artifacts identified on the west side of Lake Creek, about 0.3 km southeast of the project area. The site was recorded during a survey conducted by Archeological and Cultural Sciences Group prior to Lake Creek channel improvements (Nash 2000).

RESULTS OF BACKGROUND REVIEW AND FIELD INVESTIGATION

A review of available modern and historic topographic quadrangles and aerial photographs (NETR Online 2014) and Google Earth satellite imagery before field investigation indicated that the southern portion of the project area was cleared of wooded vegetation at least as early as 1960 and was within the floodpool level of nearby Ganzert Lake. Development of the immediate area began shortly after 2000. Associated disturbance within the project area included additional vegetation clearance and the construction of a large retention pond in 2002. The ca. 2-acre feature extended from the south-central to northeast corner of the project area with a spillway fronting the Parmer Lane right of way. By late 2008, the reservoir was filled in and replaced by the present reservoir south of Sage Grouse Drive. The period between its construction and infill included additional mechanical vegetation clearance and surface disturbance and the installation of subsurface utilities (e.g., water, sewer, and telecommunication lines) along new roadways that formed the south and west boundaries of the project area. Review of aerial imagery suggests that the still-wooded northwest corner of the APE is the least disturbed portion of the property.

Survey of the project area on December 4, 2014, revealed that construction was well underway across the entirety of the parcel. Area surfaces had been scraped to bedrock and/or graded with imported fill, road cuts had been made in some areas, and crews were removing extraneous fill material or excavating trenches for subsurface utilities placement. Due to the ongoing construction, which included heavy mechanical equipment traffic and clear indications of extensive surface disturbance, the field investigation was limited to walking the periphery of the parcel and photographing ongoing and recent mechanical construction disturbance; no shovel testing was done because of the extensive disturbance. The small wooded area in the northwest corner of the project area was bisected by several road and driveway cuts that extended down into bedrock, leaving several small islands of trees and intact sediments. A few pieces of lithic debitage and burned rocks were observed in displaced or truncated soils in and along the edges of some of these cuts, and a quartzite ground stone fragment was observed at the top of a wide ditch cut that forms the east edge of the project area. No other archeological materials were identified on the investigated margins of the project area. These isolated artifacts undoubtedly relate to previously recorded site 41WM585, which encompassed the current project area and adjoining lands to the west and southwest. No intact portions of this site remain within the current project area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A review of available topographic quadrangles, aerial photographs, and Google Earth satellite imagery before the field investigation indicated the southern part of the project APE was disturbed by historic vegetation clearance and that most of the project area

was subjected to mechanical surface disturbance after 2000. About 20 percent of the APE was extensively disturbed by the construction of a large retention pond in 2002. Modern roadways and residential developments frame the parcel; subsurface utilities run along its south and west edges; and a broad ditch cut extends along its east side. Recent and ongoing construction have extensively disturbed the modern surface across the 9.3-acre parcel, often truncating the landform and cutting well into bedrock.

The small amount of lithic debitage and burned rocks observed in the northwest corner of the parcel and the ground stone fragment observed along its east edge are undoubtedly associated with previously recorded prehistoric site 41WM585. Recent residential, commercial, and infrastructure development have extensively disturbed this site, and no intact archeological deposits remain. Hence, the site is considered ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is recommended that the proposed project be allowed to proceed without additional archeological investigations.

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