



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What type of things will the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) suggest?

Their suggestions will consist of ways to maintain the architectural integrity of the neighborhood. For existing homes, they may make suggestions regarding exterior aspects:

- Any exterior alterations except those that are not visible from the street or sidewalk. For example, a backyard deck is not reviewed.
- Additions should be secondary in appearance so as not to significantly alter the current architectural style. In this sense, it is usually recommended that any additions should be done toward the rear of the house so as not to detract from the building's street appearance.
- Using compatible building materials to maintain a consistent impression.
- Adding a garage apartment or building a new garage that fits with the architectural flavor.

The HAHC will NOT regulate suggestions regarding:

- External building color
- Landscaping
- Fences
- Interior alterations

In fact, these aspects (including interior alterations of any kind) are not even reviewed. Again, the benefit of the Historic Preservation ordinance is to provide education and information to residents about improving their homes, while maintaining the look and feel of the exterior features (listed above) that initially attracted them to the neighborhood.

2. If property owners can do what they want after a 90-day waiting period, why have Historic Designation?

Historic designation brings a sense of identity and pride to a neighborhood and may educate the homeowners about their neighborhood's history. It also sends a message to developers that only certain types of development and renovation will be considered appropriate in the neighborhood.

Remember... the vast majority of the applications end up receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness. Therefore, most of the structures in the neighborhood will retain their character under the historic designation.

3. Will property taxes automatically increase if our neighborhood receives Historic Designation?

No, historic district designation is not a factor in property appraisals or tax rates. However if a neighborhood is deemed more desirable by the market because of its architectural integrity, then it is possible that property values could rise, subsequently raising the amount of property taxes paid. Again, historic designation does not

cause the rate to change nor does it play a factor in property appraisals. Also note that tax exemptions for buildings in historic districts may be available.

4. What has been the experience of the homeowners in other neighborhoods that have received Historic Designation under the Historic Preservation Ordinance?

It is highly recommended that the property owner meet with City of Houston staff to discuss the original plans and to make recommendations meeting the standards of appropriateness.

The application process is often an education process for the property owners about the historic nature of their neighborhood. On average, the applications do not meet the standards in only about 15% of the cases. The owners can then choose to wait until the end of the 90 day waiting period to continue with their original plan and receive a 90 day Waiver Certificate rather than a Certificate of Appropriateness.

5. If I own a home in a historic district, does that mean I can't repair, change or add on to the house?

Only exterior alterations, new construction, relocations and demolitions are required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC). Expert design assistance and suggestions are available, free of charge, from City of Houston staff during the process. If plans are not approved by the HAHC, the property owner may proceed with their original plan after 90 days.

6. Can my personal property rights be violated by living in a historic district?

No. Historic designation is not a method for government telling you what to do with your property, but a way for a neighborhood to acknowledge, maintain and enhance its unique character. Historic district designation actually helps preserve and maintain your property rights by preserving the neighborhood around your property. And remember, applying for a Certificate of Appropriateness only slows down the process. Ultimately homeowners have the right to pursue the building plan of their choice.

7. If my home is in a historic district, can the City of Houston tell me how I must use my land and my property?

Historic designation does not restrict land use.

8. What restrictions are placed on new home construction in historic districts?

New homes must have similar setbacks, exterior features and proportions (height, width, length and roofline) as existing buildings on the block. It does NOT dictate architectural style. A Certificate of Appropriateness is necessary.

9. Can historic buildings in historic districts be demolished?

A Certificate of Appropriateness may be granted in cases of "unreasonable economic hardship" or "unusual and compelling circumstances". If a Certificate of Appropriateness is denied, the applicant must wait to apply after the 90 day waiting period. Then another 90 day waiting period is required before demo and new construction permits are issued.

10. What are the potential downsides to Historic Designation?

Historic Designation adds another approval process, over and above the deed restrictions (if any) to exterior renovations.

11. What if my property is not historic?

If a property is at least 50 years old, it may qualify as an historic property due to its style of architecture, its notable residents or through its various historical relationships. As such, it contributes to the proposed historic district, and may even be exceptionally significant in its own right. If it is a newer building, it benefits from the

historic surroundings. Since a district includes many properties, all owners, including non-contributing properties, are encouraged to sign the petition.

12. Will a historic designation replace our neighborhood's deed restrictions?

No. Historic designation does not affect any existing deed restrictions.

13. Will historic designation adversely affect the value of my property when I decide to sell it?

Experience with historic designated neighborhoods in Houston has shown that many buyers are more attracted to properties in recognized historic districts.

14. Will I be told what color to paint my house or how to landscape my yard?

Paint colors (either exterior or interior), fencing and landscaping are not regulated in any manner.

15. Will I be required to display a historic designation plaque on my porch if I live in a historic designated neighborhood?

No. In a City of Houston historic district, the city street sign blades are changed to denote the historic district designation. The new street signs are provided by the City at no cost to the property owners within the district.

City Landmark and/or Protected Landmark plaques are available for display at individual buildings or sites deemed historic. These buildings may or may not be found within a historic district and such plaques are at the property owner's option and expense.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Woodland Heights

www.woodland-heights.org

City of Houston Department of Planning and Development - Historic Preservation

www.houstontx.gov/planning/historic_pres/hist_pres.htm

Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance

www.houstontx.gov/planning/historic_pres/Hist_Pres_Ordin.pdf

Economic Benefits for Historic Properties in Houston

www.houstontx.gov/planning/historic_pres/historicdesignationbenefits_brochure.pdf