



CITY OF HOUSTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS

OVERVIEW

Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance

The City of Houston adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 1995 in order to save our City's history. Without the Historic Preservation Ordinance, a neighborhood's history as identified through its architecture can be at risk. The preservation of Houston's historic resources provides visible reminders of our diverse cultural heritage, encourages civic pride and boosts economic prosperity.

The Purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance

The Ordinance was created to:

- Recognize historic sites / neighborhoods
- Review alterations to the exterior of historical buildings
- Review planned new construction to ensure its continuity with the neighborhood
- Review planned relocation or demolition of historic buildings
- Work in conjunction with deed restrictions where they exist
- Provide education resources to individual neighborhoods concerning their history

How Neighborhoods Qualify for Historic Designation

A historic district is a designated geographic area which contains historical, cultural or aesthetic importance to the community. At least 51% of the property in the geographically defined area must qualify as one of the following:

Contributing: The building is at least 50 years old and its architectural integrity is intact.

Potentially Contributing: The building is at least 50 years old and its architecture has been somewhat altered but the alterations could be reversed.

To secure designation, at least 51% of the property owners equating 51% of the designated land area must sign a Historic Designation Petition. If this requirement is fulfilled, the residents will be required to adhere to the City of Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance when building or renovating their homes' exterior.

The Approval Process for Demolition, New Construction or Planned Renovations

The Houston Archeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) is a volunteer 13 member board appointed by the Mayor to review plans to alter the exterior of existing buildings, new construction, and relocation or demolition in any historically designated neighborhood. Exterior changes *do not* include painting, fencing or landscaping. In addition to Historic District designations, the HAHC also reviews requests for landmarks, protected landmarks, and archaeological sites. For more information about the HAHC, see www.houstontx.gov/planning/commissions/arch.htm.

To seek approval on new construction or planned renovation, a property owner must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness (at no cost to the applicant) and the HAHC reviews the project. In order to be considered, a COA application must be submitted approximately 2 weeks before the scheduled meeting. HAHC will either approve the project or make recommendations for alterations to the plans that better align with the neighborhood's architectural integrity. If the application is denied by the HAHC, the property owner is required to wait 90 days from the time the application was received by staff before proceeding with the original plans.

An applicant aggrieved by a decision of the HAHC with respect to any certificate of appropriateness may appeal to the commission by filing a written notice of appeal, stating the grounds for the appeal, with the planning official within ten days following the date the HAHC renders its decision.

BENEFITS OF HISTORIC DESIGNATION

- Preserves and enhances the special historical character of our neighborhood
- Stabilizes and protects property values
- Discourages demolition of historic properties
- Attracts homeowners who appreciate historic properties
- Encourages compatible new construction
- Increases neighborhood visibility with city officials and business leaders
- Provides for property tax credits and abatements
- Enhances sense of community and identity
- Makes preservation education available

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES FOR HISTORIC DESIGNATION

Tax Exemption Possibility #1: An owner of a historic building that has been designated as a City of Houston Landmark, Protected Landmark, or a building that has been classified as a “contributing” or “potentially contributing” structure located in a designated Historic District may qualify for tax exemptions.

To qualify, the property owner must perform restoration and/or renovation work to the building. The expenditures for this work must amount to at least 50% of the assessed value of the improvements prior to the work, as established by the Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD). The percentage of the tax exemption (from 50% up to 100%) is dependent on the amount of qualified expenditures relative to this initial year improvement value. The tax exemption applies to the HCAD improvement value only (not land value) for up to 15 years, and the exemption applies only to City of Houston taxes (it does not apply to any county or school district taxes).

Tax Exemption Possibility #2: While a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) is not required for interior work (remember the COA applies to exterior changes that are visible from the street or sidewalk only, excluding paint color and landscaping), interior renovation work may also be used to qualify for a tax exemption.

Tax Exemption Possibility #3: Expenditures for work performed in the five years prior to historic designation may also qualify for the tax exemption if the work is later deemed appropriate and the HAHC subsequently issues a retroactive COA.

For more information about who qualifies for the exemptions, how to calculate exemptions, how to apply for the exemptions and much more, read www.houstontx.gov/planning/historic_pres/historicdesignationbenefits_brochure.pdf.

For more general information about the City of Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance, go to www.houstontx.gov/planning/historic_pres/hist_pres.htm.