
DRAFT Recommendation to the Livable Places Action Committee Conservation Districts



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Conservation District Task Force (CDTF) recommends to the Livable Places Action Committee a framework for creating **Conservation Districts** in the City of Houston.

Purpose: To provide a more flexible way for property owners to protect their community's character and address other concerns stemming from re-development. The size of a proposed district may be just a few lots, up to an entire neighborhood or the limits of an area of cultural significance. The criteria for creating Conservation Districts may include the existence of built historic resources, sites of memory, common streetscapes, street patterns, significant archeological sites or, above all, **sites or areas of cultural significance important to the community or a source of public pride.**

Background: The CDTF recognizes that property owners in areas of local cultural significance, sometimes areas that have been historically disenfranchised or neglected, desire to protect their communities from incompatible development. While Historic Districts are a valuable tool, the requirements, and criteria for creating historic districts, particularly the concentration of historic resources required, and the level of property owner consent is often arduous. Conservation Districts may offer more versatile protections for a wider variety of elements in a neighborhood in a more flexible process. Further, protections should take the form of incentives as well as form-based regulations. Equally significant, the task force recognizes the need to find ways to address the shortage of affordable housing. The areas under pressure are in the historic core of Houston and they represent areas of key workforce housing and heretofore affordable housing. The CDTF sees potential conservation districts being used as part of future **policy tools** in the implementation of strategies to address affordability which should rely on incentives more often than regulation.

Key points in CD creation: The CDTF recommends the following with respect to the creation of an ordinance allowing for Conservation Districts in Houston.

Conservation districts creation should be **community lead**; applications should be **initiated** by entities that have a vested interest in the area, such as property owners, homeowner's associations, civic clubs, city council, residents, and TIRZ boards. Property owner support should weigh heavily in the creation.

Each Conservation District would have its own set of standards and incentives, selected from pre-identified list, authorized by City Council upon creation of the Conservation District framework. The standards and incentives may include massing, minimum lot size, lot width, lot depth, front, side, and rear setbacks, building height, demolition of significant buildings, driveways, or architectural style.

Upon creation of an individual district, property owners would establish a process for approving projects. The CDTF recommends that the level of property owner support required be commensurate with the type of restrictions or standards required on the properties. The type of review for these proposed districts may range from Administrative review handled by staff and the Planning Director to review by the HAHC, or some combination of the two, depending on the types of regulation.

The CDTF recommends flexibility in the size of districts such that a district may be as few as two properties and have no maximum size.