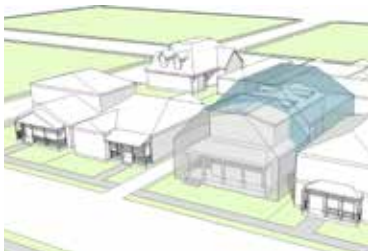
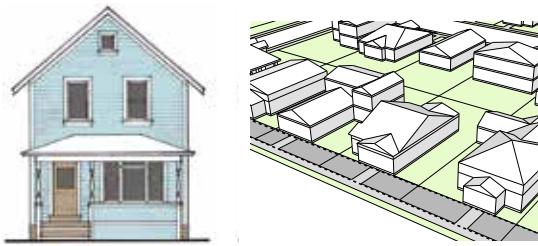


# HOUSTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS DESIGN GUIDELINES STRATEGY PAPER

For the Freeland, Houston Heights East, Houston Heights South, Houston Heights West, Norhill, Old Sixth Ward, and Woodland Heights



**ACTIVITY #3  
MASSING STUDY | ADDITIONS**

TRADITIONAL 1-STORY  
(Norhill, Freeland, Houston Heights East & West)

Existing	A	B	C
	compatible in length & height ✓	compatible in length not compatible in height	not compatible in length & height



COMPATIBLE BUILDING DESIGN SURVEY

**FREELAND**

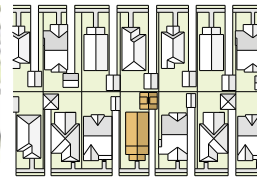
**BUILDING SCENARIO E**

This scenario illustrates a new two-story home with a one-story portion in front. It also includes a one-and-a-half story garage located to the rear of the lot. This design retains some open space on the lot. The new buildings meet the required side yard setbacks, and also maintains the traditional setbacks of the context area.

**BIRD'S EYE VIEW**



**PLAN VIEW**



**STREET LEVEL VIEWS**



Please respond to each of the statements below by selecting the answer that best describes your opinion.

**1. Lot coverage is compatible.**

Strongly Disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Strongly Agree

**2. Overall size is compatible.**

Strongly Disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Strongly Agree

**3. Building height is compatible.**

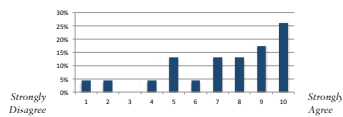
Strongly Disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Strongly Agree

**4. Building form (shape) is compatible.**

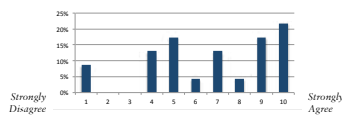
Strongly Disagree  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10 Strongly Agree

Houston, TX: Historic District Design Guidelines Project

**Lot coverage is compatible.**



**Size of addition is compatible.**



**THE CITY OF HOUSTON, TEXAS**

March 15, 2017



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction .....	1
A Data and Community-Driven Process .....	2
The Recommended Approach to the Design Guidelines.....	4
Next Steps.....	7
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
Project Background.....	10
A Data-Driven, Community-Driven Process.....	11
Scope of the Strategy Paper.....	12
Purpose of the Strategy Paper.....	12
<b>Principles of Preservation</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction .....	13
Preservation Principles .....	14
Why Preserve Historic Structures?.....	18
<b>Process Summary</b>	<b>21</b>
Introduction .....	21
Background Research and Analysis .....	22
Community Engagement.....	30
<b>Potential Building Standards</b>	<b>35</b>
Introduction .....	35
Building Design Tools .....	36
Site Design Tools .....	46
<b>Our Findings</b>	<b>53</b>
Introduction .....	53
General Conditions in the Historic Districts .....	54
Conditions in Individual Historic Districts .....	54
Compatible Design Survey Results.....	56
Public Perceptions.....	70
Guidelines Based on the Ordinance .....	71
Other Supporting Informational Needs.....	73
Findings .....	73

## **Recommendations**

**75**

The Basic Approach to the Design Guidelines .....	75
Recommendations for Prescriptive Standards .....	81
Special Design Policies to Address in the Design Guidelines .....	89
Revisions to the Design Guidelines for Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District .....	90
Recommendations for Other Work (Outside the Design Guidelines Project) .....	91
Next Steps.....	92

## **Appendices**

Design Guidelines Sample Pages .....	Appendix A
Recommended Building Standards.....	Appendix B
Compatible Design Survey: Summary of Responses.....	Appendix C
Compatible Design Survey: Detailed Responses .....	Appendix D
Compatible Design Survey: Original Documents.....	Appendix E
Background Maps .....	Appendix F
Character Area Descriptions .....	Appendix G

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## HOUSTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS DESIGN GUIDELINES STRATEGY PAPER

---

### INTRODUCTION

Initiated in October 2015, the City of Houston Historic Districts Design Guidelines project seeks to develop design guidelines for multiple historic districts throughout the city. The guidelines will help property owners interpret the requirements of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and will provide guidance regarding alterations and improvements. The standards established in the design guideline documents will assist in providing predictable review of Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC). The project is a multi-stage process that includes data analysis and research, gathering community input, refining the community’s vision for each historic district, and developing the design guidelines.

This project was prompted by a 2015 amendment to the Historic Preservation Ordinance, which requires the development of design guidelines for the Houston Heights historic districts (Houston Heights East, West and South). The requirement to prepare design guidelines for the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) provided an opportunity to also create guidelines for the Norhill, Freeland, and Woodland Heights historic districts, and to update the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District’s design guidelines.

This Strategy Paper provides an opportunity for City Council to review the direction of the project as it moves into the design guidelines drafting stage. It also offers an opportunity for the community to respond to the strategy before the details of the design guidelines documents are developed.

<b>IN THIS SECTION:</b>	
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A Data and Community-Driven Process .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Recommended Approach to the Design Guidelines.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Next Steps.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## **A DATA AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS**

This project is informed by extensive research and data analysis, robust community engagement and input, and national best practices in historic preservation. Research included Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis to determine current metrics such as the proportion of house size to lot size, and lot coverage percentage. The process also involved computer modeling of alternative building designs to explore the visual impacts of different types of infill development. Additional analysis examined existing deed restrictions that influence development in the historic districts, in-the-field observations, and a review of building plans, designation reports and historic Sanborn fire insurance maps.

Community members participated in informational meetings and workshops. In addition, property owners provided their comments through a Compatible Design Survey. The outreach process is described in Section 3 of this Strategy Paper.

### **Compatible Design Survey**

The Compatible Design Survey asked property owners to provide their opinions about recent trends in their districts, to comment on potential design tools to use in preserving the districts and to evaluate a series of alternative building models for new houses and additions while rating their compatibility.

A total of 3,486 surveys were mailed to property owners in the historic districts. (Surveys were not mailed to the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District, since theirs is an update to existing guidelines.) The survey was customized for each historic district, and responses were tabulated for them individually. The complete results, organized by historic district, are provided in Appendix D of this Strategy Paper. On average, approximately 25% responded. This yields a 95% level of confidence in the survey results with an acceptable margin of error.

### **Findings from the Survey Responses**

Overall, with just a few exceptions, respondents across all historic districts are strongly consistent in their responses to many of the survey questions. Where opinions vary between individual historic districts, additional detail that shows some of those differences is provided in this Strategy Paper. With that in mind, the analysis of survey response data shows:

#### **The Value of Historic Preservation**

- Property owners are concerned about preserving historic character.
- Respondents believe that being in a historic district adds value to properties.

### **Renovation of Contributing Structures**

- Opinions vary about the appropriateness of recent renovation projects.
- An addition that is subordinate to the contributing structure and to the site is preferred.

### **Design of New Buildings**

- Concerns continue about the size of recent new construction.
- Maintaining traditional scale in the front of a lot is important.
- Sometimes, when additional building mass is located to the rear, it can be compatible.
- A bigger house can fit in if it is well-designed, but within limits.

### **Site Design**

- A large house next door diminishes privacy in neighbors' back yards.
- Maintaining open space is a key characteristic to preserve.
- Parking on site should be subordinate to the street.
- The loss of mature vegetation is a major issue.

## **Public Understanding of Preservation Principles**

During the public workshops and focus group meetings, many topics were discussed that provide insight to some public perceptions that should be addressed in the design guidelines. For example, some people don't appreciate that cumulative, inappropriate alterations to a contributing structure can negatively affect the historic resource. There is also a lack of understanding that, with the increasing percentage of noncontributing structures in a historic district, the integrity of the historic district is diminished. The guidelines should address these topics.

Some people assume that an older building is inherently less efficient in energy conservation whereas many can be highly efficient when appropriately used and maintained. This indicates the need for information is needed related to sustainability and treatment of historic buildings. Providing information related to enhancing energy conservation while preserving historic windows is an example. Other people understand the preservation principles, but question them. For example, the concept of distinguishing new from old in the design of an addition or a new building is not universally accepted. Information about these topics should be included in the design guidelines.

## **THE RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO THE DESIGN GUIDELINES**

Considering the analysis of existing conditions, community input, and national best practices, the recommendations for developing the design guidelines are described here. They are organized into three parts: (1) General Recommendations, (2) Specific Recommendations for Prescriptive Standards, and (3) Recommendations for Special Discretionary Design Guidelines.

### **General Recommendations**

#### **Build on the Historic Preservation Ordinance.**

The Historic Preservation Ordinance includes criteria to be used when evaluating applications for Certificates of Appropriateness. The design guidelines should illustrate some of the Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria.

#### **Tailor the Design Guidelines to Each Historic District.**

Each historic district is unique in terms of its content and the characteristics that contribute to its historic significance; those differences must be reflected in the design guidelines.

#### **Use Consistent Language.**

The design guidelines should have the same organizational structure for all historic districts. While variations in the historic districts should be recognized in the design guidelines, the terms used and the way in which the material is presented should be the same.

#### **Use Prescriptive (Measurable) Standards to Enhance Predictability.**

As indicated in the survey, some design guidelines should set numbers for variables such as wall height and building setbacks. This will enhance predictability and expedite the review process.

#### **Use Qualitative Design Guidelines where flexibility is needed.**

Some design guidelines will require judgment about how well a proposal meets the requirements. These more often will be for the guidelines addressing alterations to contributing structures. Determining when a portion of exterior siding is beyond repair and needs to be replaced is an example.



**Use Illustrations to Identify Where Flexibility is Available.**

Where flexibility is available, the design guidelines should include illustrated options. For example, one set of images may show alternative design solutions for constructing an addition to a contributing structure.

**Include Cross-References and Links to Other Related Information.**

More detailed information is available on a range of topics that would help property owners when developing designs for rehabilitation and new construction.

**Publish the Design Guidelines in Modules.**

The design guidelines should be organized into “modules” (separate documents) so that the user can select those sections that apply to their project. For example, a property owner who is planning alterations to a historic house will not need the design guidelines for new infill construction. Some modules will present information that applies to all the historic districts while other modules will be tailored to fit individual historic districts. A chart, which illustrates the modules and some key topics within each, is presented in Section 6 of this paper.

**Specific Recommendations for Prescriptive Standards**

The Compatible Design Survey provides insights into the tolerance respondents have for house design in four variables: (1) lot coverage, (2) building size, (3) height, and (4) form. In the survey, a series of models presents alternative design scenarios that test how changes in those four variables influence perceptions of compatibility. The data indicate support for using design standards in the guidelines that address those four variables. The definitions of the potential prescriptive tools are in Section 4 and specific recommendations for their application are described in Section 6 of this Strategy Paper. The details of the survey responses appear in Appendix D.

The analysis found that many of the design tools could be applied to all of the historic districts, with different calibrations to fit individual districts. The recommended measurable limits for each tool are set to reflect historic precedent, but also, to permit a moderate increase in the scale of development, while still assuring compatibility.

Exceptions and special conditions may be identified while drafting the design guidelines in the next stage of this project. Specific details for measurement would be refined as well. In addition, some form of flexibility may be built into some of the design standards. This will be particularly important when applying the tools to an addition to a historic structure, because existing conditions may limit options for meeting some of the quantitative limits.

The following topics are recommended to be included as prescriptive standards in the guidelines. Each is explained in the Strategy Paper and specific measurable dimensions are proposed in Appendix B:

- Maximum Building Envelope (described in Section 4)
- Floor Area Ratio (the proportion of house size to lot area)
- Lot Coverage
- Building Setbacks
- Building Height
- Maximum Continuous Side Wall Length
- One-story Building Element (porch) in Front
- Roof Pitch

## **Recommendations for Special Discretionary Design Guidelines**

The design guidelines will address other topics that are not measurable. Many of these relate to alterations to contributing structures while others are relevant to new construction. Of these, a few topics merit an expanded discussion in the design guidelines. These are:

- Replacing a historic window – when it may be appropriate and when it may not
- Alternative siding materials on contributing structures – when matching the original should be required and when alternatives may be considered
- Additions to contributing structures – how to remain subordinate and to be compatible
- Porch design – how scale, proportion, style, and detail should be treated
- Window design in a new addition – how a new window should relate to those on the contributing structure
- Differentiating old from new construction in historic districts – why this is important and ways to achieve it
- Treating an older addition that has taken on historic significance
- Relocating windows and doors on historic structures

Other topics appropriate for discretionary guidelines appear in the chart illustrating the proposed modular structure for the design guidelines in Section 6.

## **NEXT STEPS**

This Strategy Paper provides a check-point in the process of developing the design guidelines for the historic districts that are engaged in this process. The paper will be presented to the HAHC on March 29, 2017 and in a public workshop on March 30. A comment period will follow. Details for the comment period will be published on the City's website. After comments are collected, and guidance from City Council is received, the formal drafting of the design guidelines will proceed. The drafting of the design guidelines for Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) will be first.



# INTRODUCTION

## HOUSTON HISTORIC DISTRICTS DESIGN GUIDELINES STRATEGY PAPER

Initiated in October 2015, the City of Houston Historic Districts Design Guidelines project seeks to develop design guidelines for multiple historic districts throughout the city. The guidelines will help property owners interpret the requirements of the Historic Preservation Ordinance and will provide guidance regarding alterations and improvements. The project will also help clarify the community’s expectations for historic preservation in each of the historic districts. The standards established in the design guideline documents will assist in providing predictable review of Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC).

The project is a multi-stage process that includes data analysis and research, gathering community input, refining the community’s vision for each historic district, and developing the design guidelines. This Strategy Paper describes the project as it has occurred to date and proposes the approach and specific steps for developing the individual design guidelines documents for each historic district.



**NOTE:**

**A note about photographs used in this Strategy Paper:**

**Images of buildings in the historic districts that are part of this project are included to illustrate existing conditions of some types of properties. They are included without comment and are not intended to represent appropriate or inappropriate designs.**

**IN THIS SECTION:**

Project Background.....	10
A Data-Driven, Community-Driven Process.....	11
Scope of the Strategy Paper.....	12
Purpose of the Strategy Paper.....	12



## PROJECT BACKGROUND

This project was prompted by a 2015 amendment to the Historic Preservation Ordinance, which requires the development of design guidelines for the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South). The ordinance also permits the City to prepare design guidelines for existing historic districts that do not yet possess guidelines and would benefit from them. Thus, the requirement to prepare design guidelines for the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) provided an opportunity to also create guidelines for the Norhill, Freeland, and Woodland Heights historic districts, and to update the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District's design guidelines.

The design guidelines project is split into two phases. Phase I includes new design guidelines for the three Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South), Freeland Historic District, Woodland Heights Historic District, and Norhill Historic District, and an update to the existing Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District design guidelines. In Phase II, design guidelines will be written for the Main Street Market Square and Glenbrook Valley historic districts.

No changes to the Historic Preservation Ordinance are within this scope of work. While conducting a thorough review of the ordinance was key to the project, it was only done so to gain background knowledge and to ensure that the future design guidelines will be coordinated with, and not contradict, the ordinance.

This Strategy Paper focuses on the research, data analysis, public engagement, and strategy for the design guidelines for the Phase I historic districts.

### NOTE:

**The Strategy Paper introduces some terms in addition to those used in the Historic Preservation Ordinance. These terms are used nationally and are have acquired a standard meaning throughout the historic preservation profession. They are not intended to replace terms used in the ordinance, but may be used in the guidelines to help explain those that do appear in the ordinance.**

## A DATA-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROCESS

Design guidelines for the Phase I historic districts are informed by extensive research and data analysis, thorough community engagement and input, and national best practices in historic preservation.

Research conducted so far included Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis to determine current metrics such as the proportion of house size to lot size, also known as Floor Area Ratio (FAR described on page 44), lot coverage percentage, building age, size, and more. The research process also included extensive modeling to explore the visual impacts of different types of infill development. Some additional analysis examined the existing deed restrictions that influence development in the historic districts, in-the-field analysis, and a review of building plans, designation reports and historic Sanborn fire insurance maps. This research identified specific neighborhood characteristics and development patterns, as well as how each historic district has (or has not) changed over time.

Public input strongly influences the design guidelines project. Community workshops have provided property owners an opportunity to give input on the issues and provide a vision for the historic districts. In addition, community members have provided their feedback through a Compatible Design Survey that offered a chance to comment on issues, design tools, and the appropriateness of different types and scale of additions and infill development in the historic district.

Finally, the design guideline strategy is informed by best practices in historic preservation that have developed through extensive usage in communities across the nation, and can help provide guidance on how to preserve and enhance the character of the historic districts.



*This map illustrates the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for each parcel in the Houston Heights Historic District West.*



*In October 2016, workshop participants discussed key features of their historic districts.*



*Models like this one exploring the potential for appropriate additions in the districts were utilized in the Compatible Design Survey and will be used in the design guidelines to illustrate appropriate treatment options.*

## **SCOPE OF THE STRATEGY PAPER**

This Strategy Paper represents a critical stage in the design guidelines project. Using input gathered from community workshops, online surveys and other community feedback, it identifies a strategy for developing design guidelines.

This paper outlines the project process completed to date, summarizes the findings of analysis and outreach, presents specific tools that will be utilized in the design guidelines, and outlines the design guidelines that will be developed. The Strategy Paper also identifies some key topics that will be addressed in the design guidelines documents. Some of these are issues raised in community workshops and surveys.

In addition, the Strategy Paper outlines particular measurable design tools to which prescriptive standards can be applied. These standards are to be tailored to individual historic districts in order to address their unique physical settings and design issues. For example, building size is identified as an issue in some of the historic districts. In response, a maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is proposed to regulate building size. This and other potential tools are discussed later in this paper.

Finally, the Strategy Paper outlines the content to be included in the design guideline documents and explains their relationship to other existing preservation policy documents (including the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the existing historic preservation web manual, other existing design guideline documents, and neighborhood deed restrictions). Several Appendices to this Strategy Paper provide important background information and are referenced throughout.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY PAPER**

This Strategy Paper provides an opportunity for City Council to review the direction of the project as it moves into the design guidelines drafting stage. It also offers an opportunity for the community to respond to the Strategy before the consultant develops the details of the design guidelines documents. The Strategy Paper will guide staff and consultants in developing design guidelines during the next steps of the project.