

INTRODUCTION

This section describes the background research and analysis that has occurred to date. It also provides a summary of outreach conducted by the City, as well as outreach conducted by the consultant, including workshops and surveys. While each of these items is summarized, the findings are not presented in this section. They will be discussed later in the Paper.



Community workshop for the Houston Historic Districts Design Guidelines Project

IN THIS SECTION:

Introduction	21
Background Research and Analysis	22
Community Engagement.....	30

BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

Historic Preservation Ordinance

The Historic Preservation Ordinance allows City Council to designate buildings, structures, sites, or districts that are of historical, cultural, architectural, and/or archaeological significance to the City of Houston. The ordinance offers protection to historically designated buildings from demolition, regulates exterior modifications and relocation, and regulates new construction in historic districts. The Historic Preservation Ordinance was first passed in 1995. A Tax Exemption Ordinance, which currently grants tax exemptions to property owners for up to 15 years for value-enhancing restorations, was passed concurrently. Both ordinances have been amended multiple times in the years since.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance was most recently updated in 2015 and provided amendments that allow HAHC to initiate the creation of Design Guidelines for existing historic districts; increase the scope of projects that can be approved administratively; establish an Appeals Board for HAHC appeals; clarify certain review criteria in the ordinance; require yard signs as public notice of COA applications; allow for the adoption of application fees for COAs; provide a process for reclassifying structures in historic districts; and alter the eligibility criteria for the historic site tax exemption to favor rehabilitation over additions.

The Evolution of the Ordinance

Since its initial adoption in 1995, the ordinance has undergone a series of modifications, including:

- March 1, 1995:** Historic Preservation Ordinance PASSES at City Council. (95-228)
- March 1, 1995:** Historic Tax Exemption Ordinance PASSES at City Council. (95-227)
- 2001:** Tax Exemption Ordinance is AMENDED.
- December 12, 2001:** Prevailing lot size and building line preservation tools are created by ordinance.
- August 17, 2005:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council. (05-969)
- July 26, 2006:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council. (06-0783)
- April 11, 2007:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council. (07-0463)
- August 1, 2007:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council to create Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District. (07-885)
- March 4, 2009:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council. (09-191)
- October 13, 2010:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council.
- October 7, 2015:** Ordinance is AMENDED by City Council. (15-967) (effective Nov 6, 2015)

Review of the Ordinance

The consultants reviewed the Historic Preservation Ordinance in order to identify topics that should be addressed in the design guidelines. The ordinance sets forth the basic criteria for approval of proposed exterior architectural changes, in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). In doing so, the ordinance introduces several concepts that the design guidelines may build on. For example, in Sec. 33-242 of the ordinance, criteria for new construction are provided, including item (3):

The scale and proportions of the new construction, including the relationship of the width, overall height, eave height, foundation height, porch height, roof shape, and roof pitch, and other dimensions to each other, must be compatible with the typical scale and proportions of existing contributing structures in the context area unless special circumstances, such as an atypical use, location, or lot size, warrant an atypical scale and proportions;

Design guidelines that provide measurable information about the size, height, and roof pitch of existing contributing structures, tailored to each of the respective historic districts, would help to inform users in applying this criterion in the ordinance.

Specific prescriptive measures for the approval of “Shall Approve” conditions are also defined. For example, in Sec. 33-241.1 of the ordinance, measurable criteria for Administrative Approval, in which a Certificate of Appropriateness is issued by the Planning Staff, rather than HAHC, include these requirements for a side addition:

- (2) *A side addition that:*
- a. *Is not taller than the existing structure;*
 - b. *Is attached only to one exterior wall of the existing structure and does not extend past the existing rear wall of the side to which it is attached;*
 - c. *Is set back from the front of the wall to which it is attached at least 30 percent of the distance between the front of the wall to which it is attached to the rear of the wall to which it is attached;*
 - d. *Is not wider than half the distance that the addition is set back from the front of the wall to which it is attached. For example, if the addition is set back 20 feet from the front wall to which it is attached, the addition may not be wider than ten feet;*
 - e. *Has a roof pitch that is less than or equal to the existing structure; and*
 - f. *Is not constructed on a building that has had an addition approved under this chapter.*

While this text is relatively clear, illustrations in the design guidelines would make these dimensional standards easier to understand and interpret.

Note that no changes to the ordinance itself are within this scope of work. The intent in reviewing the ordinance is to assure that the design guidelines are coordinated with it. Also note that the ordinance permits the design guidelines to be more restrictive, but not less restrictive, than the criteria set forth in the ordinance in Sec. 33-267(b)(3).

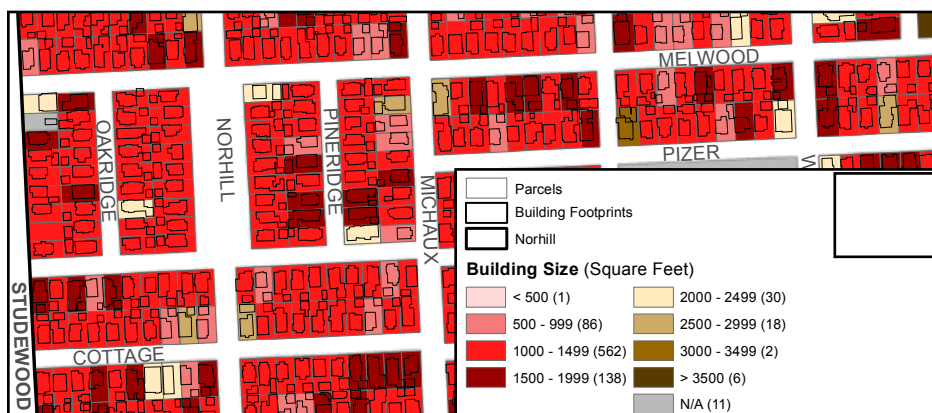
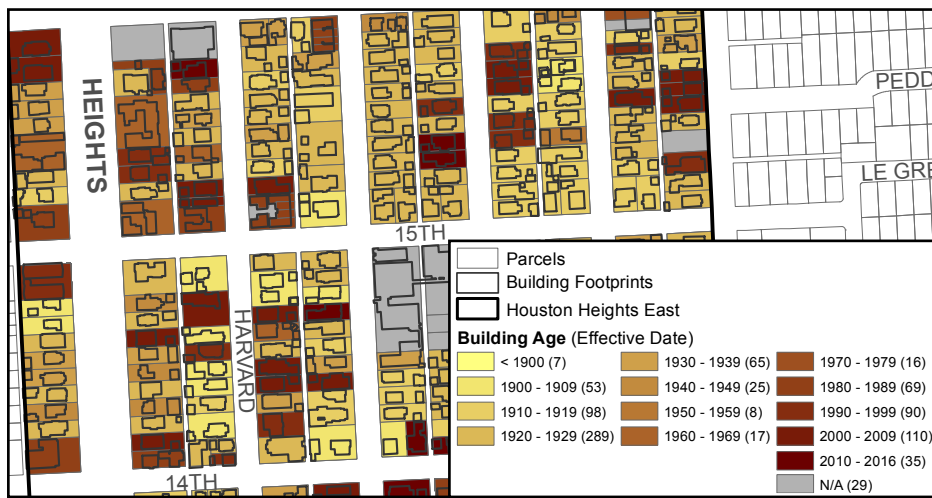
Previous Informational Materials

Informational materials that were developed previously for the Houston historic districts were reviewed as part of the project. These included existing design guidelines, deed restrictions, maps, reports, agreements, inventories, presentations, photographs, and surveys from the associated historic districts. Another informational document is the City's Historic Preservation Manual, which is discussed later in this section.

Data Gathering and Analysis

City staff assisted by assembling a series of Geographic Information System technology (GIS) data for each historic district. A GIS system is designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographical data. This was used to develop a series of five Data Maps for each historic district to help the consultants understand the degree of consistency or diversity that exists, as well as other patterns of development.

These data maps help to show historical and current development patterns. For example, one set of maps documents the distribution of buildings by age. In some historic districts, highly consistent groupings by age occur, whereas in others, a wider mix exists. Examples of these maps appear below:



A Building Age map shows the effective build dates for each house in the district. Note that building age in the GIS system usually reflects the original building date, but may at times mean an “effective” building date, if the property was significantly altered at a later stage. Ages are shown in 10-year intervals from 1900 to 2016.

Building size, measured in square footage of floor area, appears in 500 square foot (SF) increments in the data maps. Building sizes range from less than 500 SF to greater than 3,500 SF. This information reflects existing building size, including additions.

Lot Size Patterns

(Woodland map detail)

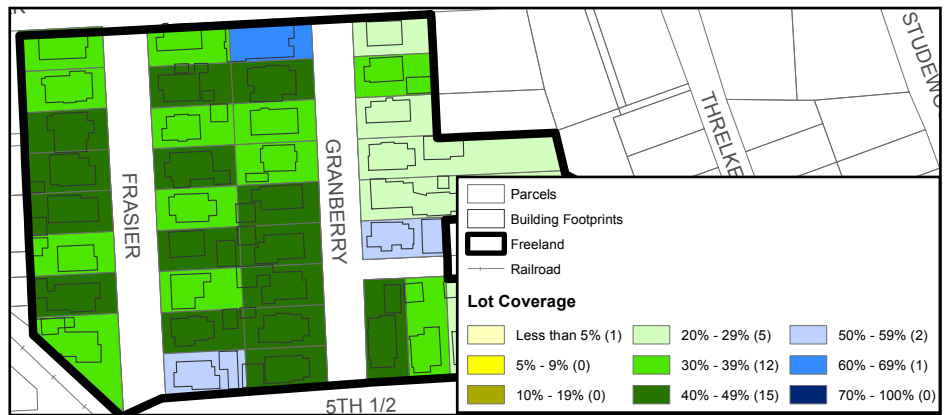
This map shows a distinct pattern in the distribution of lot size (the area of each lot in square feet (SF)). In these maps, lot sizes are expressed in 1,000 SF increments and range from less than 4,000 SF to greater than 10,000 SF.



Lot Coverage

(Freeland map detail)

The Lot Coverage map shows the proportion of building footprint to lot size as a percentage. Lot coverage is shown in 5% increments, ranging from less than 5% to greater than 70%.



Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

(Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District map detail)

The proportion of building size to lot size is expressed as a Floor Area Ratio (FAR), shown in 0.10 increments ranging from 0.05 to greater than 0.70. (See page 44 for additional information on FAR.)



This analysis of GIS data maps yielded descriptions for a set of *Typologies* that were developed for the historic districts. As a result of discussion at the community workshop in September of 2016 (discussed on page 32), the term *Typology* was changed to *Character Area*. These Character Areas provide descriptions of some of the key features that are found in various parts of the historic districts. They include some statistical data, such as the percentage of lot coverage and range of house sizes. Character Areas are discussed in Appendix G. The GIS maps appear in the Appendix F.

Field Analysis

The consultants and Planning staff toured the historic districts several times to gain an understanding of:

- Recent trends in development, including rehabilitation projects, additions to historic buildings, and new infill construction
- Development patterns, noting features that have a high degree of consistency (such as front setbacks) and other features that have more variety, such as differences in building periods and architectural styles
- Key character-defining features, such as the degree of similarity or diversity in building form, scale, and materials
- Types of historic resources, in terms of the degree of similarity or diversity in building age, height, and style
- Design issues related to the character of recent alterations that have occurred to historic buildings, as well as the scale, character, and location of additions to historic buildings and new construction

The consultants also photographed existing conditions in each of the historic districts and evaluated those images for appropriateness, in terms of the degree to which the integrity of historic resources has been maintained and the extent to which new construction is compatible.



The images above show examples of existing conditions in some of the historic districts. The top image shows an unaltered historic house, the bottom left image shows an addition to a historic house, and the bottom right image shows new construction in a historic district.

Historic Inventories

A Historic Inventory is a listing of each property in a historic district, providing basic information related to that property's historic significance. Inventories, associated with designation reports, are available for the historic districts within this project. This material was used to enhance the consultants' understanding of building ages within the historic districts.

Historic Preservation Manual

The Historic Preservation Manual is an online document developed by the Houston Planning and Development Department that includes information about the city's preservation regulations, as well as about individual historic districts. For historic districts which do not yet have design guidelines, historic district profiles include information about the district's history, architecture, and significance.



Home page from the online Historic Preservation Manual

Deed Restrictions

Deed Restrictions were researched and reviewed for the historic districts in this project. The design guidelines are intended to support, not contradict, these deed restrictions.

Deed restrictions in Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) are voluntary and on a lot-by-lot basis, not throughout the historic districts. And only some of Woodland Heights is covered by deed restrictions, as opposed to Norhill, which is 90% covered.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The City of Houston has undertaken an extensive public outreach process during this project, with the goal of engaging as many property owners in the Phase I historic districts as possible.

Digital, Traditional, and Social Media

The City of Houston created a project webpage within the Planning and Development Department's website to announce upcoming meetings, gather input and feedback, and archive project information. The City also sends project-related announcements via an email list of people who have indicated that they are interested in historic preservation; CitizensNet; and the Planning Department's Twitter and Facebook pages.

Press releases have been used to announce community meetings, the Compatible Design Survey, and other project activities. Traditional media outlets, including the Houston Chronicle and The Leader community newspaper, have published articles about the project. Houston Public Media has interviewed project manager Steph McDougal several times for the Houston Matters radio show.

Neighborhood associations and individual community members have also helped to publicize community meetings and surveys by posting on their own websites, email lists, and various social media sites.



Home page for the Houston Historic Preservation Design Guidelines Project

Direct Input from Property Owners and Residents

Since the beginning of this project, property owners and residents have contacted City project manager Steph McDougal via email and telephone to ask questions and provide feedback. Comments and questions, as well as responses, are tracked and periodically summarized in a report, which is then posted on the City's project webpage.

Community Meetings

The design guidelines project began, in Fall 2015, with two immediate activities: start the process of hiring a qualified consultant to develop the design guidelines, and engage the community while the contracting process was underway. While the City was required to develop design guidelines for the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South), the Request for Proposals for this project asked respondents to also include other historic districts which either had requested design guidelines or would benefit from them. Initial community outreach included a series of meetings for property owners in the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South), but in February 2016, the City determined that it would also develop design guidelines for additional historic districts. Subsequently, community meetings were held in those districts as well.

City of Houston project manager Steph McDougal led the early community meetings and has continued to meet with neighborhood associations and deed restrictions committees throughout the project. The consultants have led two community workshops and have also participated in meetings with members of the HAHC and the project advisory committee, and focus-group conference calls with property owners in Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) and the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District Conservation Committee. Summary reports for these meetings are provided on the City's project webpage.

Community engagement activities have included:

- Community meetings for the Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South)
 - » December 8, 2015
 - » January 14, 2016
 - » February 16, 2016
 - » April 26, 2016
- Houston Heights Association meeting (January 11, 2016)
- Community meeting for Freeland Historic District (April 12, 2016)
- Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District Conservation Committee meeting (April 13, 2016)
- Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association meeting (April 18, 2016)



- Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association meeting (May 16, 2016)
- Community meeting for Norhill Historic District (June 15, 2016)
- Community meeting for Woodland Heights Historic District (June 20, 2016)
- Focus Group call with Winter & Co. for Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) residents (August 16, 2016)
- Norhill Deed Restrictions Committee Meeting (October 10, 2016)
- Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District Conservation Committee meeting (October 16, 2016)
- Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District Conservation Committee focus group call (January 23, 2017)

Community Workshops with the Consultants

The consultants have led two community workshops so far: on September 27, 2016, and December 1, 2016. Each workshop included an informative presentation by the consultants, followed by exercises to gather participants' feedback, and a question-and-answer session. Meeting materials were made available after the workshops on the City's project webpage, and workshop exercises were made available online for those who were unable to attend in person.

The September workshop provided information about historic preservation and the consultants' process in developing design guidelines, then asked participants to work together in groups with others from the same historic district. The activities gathered feedback on:

- Issues and concerns about the neighborhoods
- The consultants' understanding of key characteristics in each historic district
- Compatibility of sample additions and new construction
- Compatibility of sample architectural styles and features

The consultants used that information to develop materials for the December workshop, which presented fundamental concepts in historic preservation, design tools which could potentially be included in the design guidelines, and a summary of the feedback received during the September workshop. During group exercises, participants were asked to provide feedback on a draft version of a Compatible Design Survey, customized for each historic district, which focused on issues affecting their neighborhood, the potential design tools, and the compatibility of sample additions and new construction. These exercises were also made available online, and the responses combined with those received in person at the workshop.

Compatible Design Survey

The Compatible Design Survey, previously called the “Visual Preferences Survey,” asks participants 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. The survey was developed from the responses in the community workshops (in person and online).

The survey was tailored to each historic district. A printed copy was mailed to each property owner of record, and an online option also was available. Unique survey numbers were utilized to prevent multiple responses from one address. To encourage participation and make property owners aware of the survey, postcards were mailed to each property owner in advance. Flyers were posted in local shops, and door-hanger notices were placed on owner-occupied properties. The City also worked with neighborhood associations and individuals to help publicize the survey via social media.

A total of 3,486 surveys were mailed out to the historic districts:

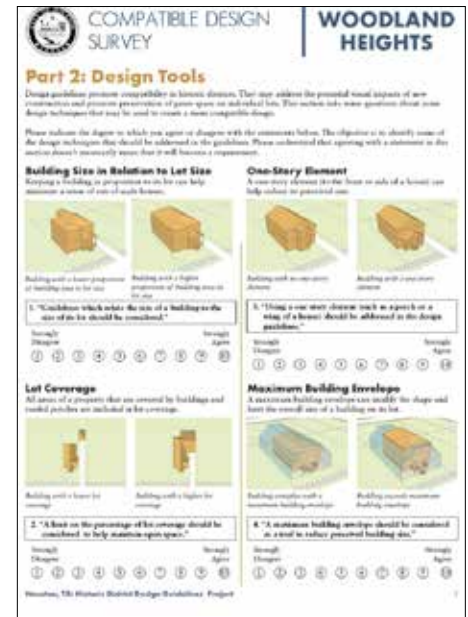
- Freeland (36)
- Norhill (850)
- Woodland Heights (386)
- Houston Heights Historic District East (905)
- Houston Heights Historic District West (521)
- Houston Heights Historic District South (788)

The Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District did not participate in the survey, as its existing design guidelines are being updated, rather than developed from scratch.

The summary of response rates which follows is based on these fundamental aspects of statistical analysis:

- **Percentage of responses:** This is calculated by dividing the total number of responses (both mailed and online) by the total number of surveys mailed.
- **Survey Reliability:** In general, the results of a survey achieve reliability when the data set from which the results are calculated satisfies certain thresholds of data quantity and quality.
- **Interpretation:** This process is based on a standardized margin of error, which is calculated according to a 95% confidence level (industry standard). Results with a higher margin of error are less reliable, while results with a lower margin of error are more valuable or favorable.

Note: Approximately 25-35% of all properties are not owner-occupied. This is consistent across all of the Phase I historic districts. This likely affected response rates.



Sample page from Woodland Heights
Compatible Design Survey

Survey Accuracy

Because it is rarely feasible to interview every single individual in a particular group, surveys are often used to sample opinions of a representative population. The accuracy of the sampling is influenced by the number of individuals within the overall group, the number of survey respondents, and the amount of difference in the survey answers. Generally, as the number of survey respondents increases, the accuracy of the sample results increases as well.

Many surveys seek to have enough responses to achieve a level of confidence of 90% to 95%. This means that other people in this population (all those who received the survey) would be expected to respond in the same way 90% to 95% of the time as those who did respond to the survey. Depending upon the percentage of those responding out of the total population, there is also a margin of error, which means that answers could vary, plus or minus, by that percentage.

The table below shows the margin of error for the survey responses from each of the historic districts, using a level of confidence of 95%. For the relatively small survey populations in the historic districts, the response rates shown are strong, and the margin of error ranges between 4% and 6% for most of the individual districts. As an example, Houston Heights Historic District East has a response rate of 27% and a margin of error of 4%. This means that other property owners in that district can be expected to respond in a similar manner to those who did respond, with a range of deviation of plus or minus 4%. The exception is Freeland, which has a margin of error of 12% because the survey population is very small.

This information influenced the recommendations that follow (in Section 6), in these ways. In some cases, where a high percentage of people expressed the same opinions, this was an indication that proposing design guidelines addressing those issues should be included, and that the language should be firm. In other cases, the opinions were more divided, and in those cases, indicated that the design guidelines should be more flexible, or more general in nature.

Houston Historic Districts Compatible Design Survey - January 2017				
Historic District	Number of Surveys Mailed	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses	Margin of Error
Freeland	36	23	64%	12%
Houston Heights East	905	246	27%	5%
Houston Heights South	788	192	24%	6%
Houston Heights West	521	134	26%	7%
Norhill	850	205	24%	6%
Woodland Heights	386	123	32%	7%

Survey results with a 95% rate of confidence. Source: Survey Monkey