



City of Houston
Historic Districts Design Guidelines
Annual Report — May 2017

Introduction

Design guidelines for historic districts within the City of Houston are regulated under Chapter 33 of the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, which provides for the creation of new design guidelines and the updating of existing design guidelines. The Houston Archeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) may direct the Director of Planning and Development to prepare design guidelines for historic districts that lack them, and may recommend amendments to existing design guidelines. Amendments to existing design guidelines, except for those for the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District (OSWPHD), must be approved by City Council. In the case of OSWPHD's design guidelines, HAHC has the authority to approve amendments that have been recommended in any annual report, after holding a public hearing on the proposed changes.

This annual report contains an update on the status of pending design guidelines, recommends amendments to existing design guidelines, and suggests future action to create design guidelines for some remaining historic districts.

Chapter 33 Provisions for Design Guidelines

Prior to 2010, Chapter 33 contained no provisions for the adoption of enforceable historic district design guidelines. Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District was created through a special process in 2007 that included the adoption of enforceable design guidelines for that district alone. Educational design guidelines were developed in 2008 for several historic districts (Houston Heights, Westmoreland, and Avondale). These documents were solely informational, were not subject to public input, and were not adopted by HAHC or City Council. Ordinance amendments in 2010 rendered these design guidelines obsolete.

The Chapter 33 amendments in 2010 require the City to create design guidelines for all newly designated historic districts, if no guidelines were submitted by the historic district applicants with their application. The Planning Department subsequently created design guidelines for Germantown, Starkweather, and High First Ward (adoption currently on hold).

Chapter 33 was further amended in 2015 to require the development of design guidelines for the three Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) and to allow HAHC to authorize the creation of design guidelines for any other historic districts without them.

The OSWPHD is unique in that amendments to its design guidelines may be approved by HAHC, without additional review by City Council (Sec. 33-277). Design guidelines for all other districts are subject to the provisions of Sec. 33-266 through 33-268 adopted in Nov 2015.

Relevant sections of Chapter 33 can be found at the end of this report.

Status of All Historic District Design Guidelines

Three historic districts have adopted design guidelines, and a fourth district has a draft set whose adoption is temporarily on hold:

- Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District: designated and guidelines adopted in Aug 2007.
- Germantown Historic District: designated Dec 2012; guidelines adopted Nov 2013.
- Starkweather Historic District: designated Feb 2014; guidelines adopted Sep 2014.
- High First Ward Historic District: designated May 2014; design guidelines developed, but adoption put on hold due to Chapter 33 review and revisions in 2014-2015.

Six historic districts have new design guidelines that are under development at this time:

- Houston Heights Historic Districts East, West, and South
- Norhill Historic District
- Freeland Historic District
- Woodland Heights Historic District

Two districts are scheduled to receive new design guidelines in 2018:

- Main Street Market Square
- Glenbrook Valley

The remaining 10 city historic districts do not have design guidelines.

Current Historic District Design Guidelines Project

In late 2015, the City issued a request for proposals, the scope of work for which included the required Houston Heights design guidelines, with optional alternatives to create design guidelines for five other historic districts (Norhill, Woodland Heights, Freeland, Glenbrook Valley, and Main Street/Market Square) and to update the existing design guidelines for the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District. Following the receipt of a financially attractive proposal from Winter & Company (a Denver, Colorado, historic preservation and planning firm specializing in design guidelines), Planning staff recommended that design guidelines for all nine historic districts should be completed. HAHC concurred, and City Council approved that recommendation on May 10, 2016.

The project is being undertaken in phases:

- Phase 1A: new guidelines for Houston Heights East, Houston Heights West, and Houston Heights South; to be delivered in Aug 2017.
- Phase 1B: new guidelines for Norhill, Woodland Heights, and Freeland, and an update for Old Sixth Ward; scheduled to be delivered in Feb 2018.
- Phase 2: new guidelines for Main Street/Market Square and Glenbrook Valley; expected to begin in Oct 2017 and conclude in Jun 2018.

The background data collection, analysis, and community engagement with Winter & Company combined the Phase 1A and 1B districts for expediency and cost savings, and is currently in-progress.

Each set of Winter & Company design guidelines will utilize five “universal” sections that apply to all historic districts, and four customized sections, which will be specific to the individual historic district. Once the organizational structure, formatting, and content is finalized for the “universal” sections, Planning staff will be able to update the Germantown, Starkweather, and High First Ward design guidelines to align with the Winter & Company model. All updating efforts will involve community engagement, including mailings to property owners, community meetings, and public hearings.

Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District

In 2015, representatives of OSWPHD requested updates to their existing guidelines. As this request occurred within the same time frame as the initial phases of the project for the six Greater Heights-area districts, OSWPHD was included in the data collection, analysis, and community engagement process conducted by Winter & Company.

For the Old Sixth Ward, the Planning Department recommends a two-phase process of amendments in 2017. The first phase proposes to disallow all administrative approvals in the OSWPHD, at the request of the district representatives, so that all future COAs will be determined by HAHC in a public meeting. The second phase of amendments will address substantive changes still to be determined through the public-engagement process that is currently in progress.

Potential New Design Guidelines Projects

The HAHC may direct the Planning Director to prepare design guidelines for any historic district without adopted guidelines if HAHC finds that design guidelines would be of benefit to the review of COAs in the district. Once HAHC has authorized the preparation of new design guidelines, the Planning Department has one year to develop and present the new guidelines to HAHC (Sec. 33-266). Several districts have informally indicated an interest in having design guidelines created for them. Because of the one-year timeframe, staff does not recommend that the HAHC request the development of design guidelines for these districts *at this time*, but that HAHC consider it within the next one to two years.

Historic districts that have indicated an interest in having design guidelines	Boulevard Oaks* First Montrose Commons
Historic districts which may be candidates for design guidelines in the future	Avondale East Avondale West Audubon Place Westmoreland
Historic districts not currently thought to need or want design guidelines	Broadacres Courtlandt Place Shadow Lawn W 11 th Place
Existing design guidelines which require updates	Germantown Starkweather High First Ward

* Highest priority

Recommended Actions

Staff recommends that HAHC approve the following actions:

1. Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District:
 - a. Update existing guidelines to disallow administrative approvals, to be considered by HAHC after a public hearing at the June 15 HAHC meeting.
 - b. Adopt further amendments to be brought forward later in 2017, at the conclusion of the current public engagement process; hearing date to be determined.
2. Germantown, Starkweather, and High First Ward Historic Districts: Update existing design guidelines to align with the Winter & Company model.
3. Boulevard Oaks Historic District, First Montrose Commons: Within next 1-2 years, direct the Planning Director to develop new design guidelines for these districts.

Sec. 33-266. Application.

- (a) The applicants for the designation of an historic district may prepare and submit proposed design guidelines as part of the application. If the applicants do not submit proposed design guidelines, the director shall prepare design guidelines for consideration by city council within one year after the creation of an historic district.
- (b) The HAHC or city council may direct the director to prepare design guidelines for one or more historic districts for which no design guidelines have been adopted in accordance with subsection (a) of this section if the HAHC or city council finds that the adoption of design guidelines would benefit the review of certificates of appropriateness for the historic district. The director shall prepare design guidelines for the historic district in accordance with the following:
 - (1) The director shall conduct one or more public meetings within or near the historic districts for which design guidelines are proposed to enable the public to provide input on the proposed guidelines;
 - (2) The director shall mail notice to all property owners within the historic districts for which design guidelines are proposed not less than 15 days before each public meeting; and
 - (3) The director shall present design guidelines to the HAHC within one year of the request for design guidelines, or if the director is unable to do so, the director shall report on the progress of the design guidelines to the HAHC and include a timeline for completion of the design guidelines.
- (c) The director shall present design guidelines to city council for consideration for the Heights East, Heights West, and Heights South historic districts within sixteen months of the passage of Ordinance No. 2015-967, after which time, the design guidelines previously submitted to the director shall be automatically adopted for any of the districts mentioned in this section for which design guidelines have not been adopted by city council.

Sec. 33-268. Approval; effect of approval; amendment.

- (a) The director shall present the proposed design guidelines for adoption to the HAHC, who shall conduct a public hearing on the adoption of the design guidelines. The director shall mail notice to all property owners within the historic districts to be affected by the design guidelines not less than 15 days before the public hearing before the HAHC. At the public hearing, interested parties may comment in person or in writing on the proposed design guidelines. At the close of the public hearing, the HAHC shall vote to disapprove, defer, or recommend that city council approve the proposed design guidelines in the form presented to the HAHC or as amended by HAHC during the public hearing. The director shall present any recommended design guidelines to city council as soon as is reasonably possible.
- (b) The city council shall consider the recommendation of the HAHC and shall vote to approve or disapprove the design guidelines in the form in which they are recommended by the HAHC. If city council disapproves the design guidelines, the director shall revise the design guidelines in accordance with any suggested changes made by city council, and resubmit the design guidelines to HAHC in accordance with the provisions of subsection (a) of this section as soon as is reasonably possible. After approval by city council, the HAHC shall use the criteria within the design guidelines for granting or denying applications for certificates of appropriateness for applicable activities within the boundaries of the historic district.
- (c) Amendments to design guidelines that have been approved by city council shall be considered in accordance with the process for the adoption of design guidelines in this section.

Sec. 33-277. Amendment of design guidelines. [OSWPHD]

The HAHC shall conduct a public hearing on amendments to the design guidelines if changes are recommended by the HAHC in any annual report. At the public hearing, interested parties may comment in person or in writing on any recommended amendments to the design guidelines. Following the public hearing, the HAHC may amend the design guidelines.