



City of Houston Historic District Design Guidelines Frequently Asked Questions

What are Design Guidelines?

Design guidelines are reference materials, commonly used by City governments throughout the United States to provide helpful guidance to owners of property in historic districts.

Historic districts are managed through local laws (city ordinances) that describe what types of changes are allowed in those districts and the process for making changes to historic buildings. The City of Houston contains 22 historic districts, each of which is unique, but the historic preservation ordinance must be written broadly enough to apply to all of them. Design guidelines help to explain and illustrate what the ordinance means for each individual district, making these guidelines a helpful tool during the project planning process and hopefully saving property owners time and money.

Which historic districts have or will have Design Guidelines?

Design guidelines have been adopted for Old Sixth Ward, Germantown, and Starkweather Historic Districts. Guidelines for these districts and draft guidelines for High First Ward Historic District are being updated to reflect the latest ordinance amendments. New design guidelines are currently being developed for Houston Heights East, West, and South; Norhill; Woodland Heights; and Freeland Historic Districts.

The first design guidelines adopted by the City of Houston were created for the Old Sixth Ward Protected Historic District in 2007. The City of Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance, as amended in 2010, required the City to develop design guidelines for any new historic districts; the Germantown, Starkweather, and High First Ward Historic Districts have been designated since that time. When the ordinance was amended again, in September 2015, it required the City to develop design guidelines for three more historic districts: Houston Heights East, Houston Heights West, and Houston Heights South. During Phase 1 of this project, design guidelines will be developed for those three districts as well as the Norhill, Woodland Heights and Freeland Historic Districts, and the design guidelines for Old Sixth Ward will be updated. Phase 2 will create design guidelines for the Main Street Market Square Historic District (downtown) and Glenbrook Valley Historic District.

How is the Planning Department making property owners aware of this project?

The City is using a variety of methods (including mailings, email, surveys, social media, and newspaper/radio) to get information into the community and to encourage people to participate.

The City has mailed notices of public meetings to all property owners, as required by ordinance. Project manager Steph McDougal has been meeting with property owners and other stakeholders since December 2015 to gather their input, and consultants from Winter & Company began meeting with the

community in September 2016 -- the first of five meetings that will take place before the design guidelines are completed. In addition to community workshops and mailings, outreach for this project includes interviews, focus groups, email notifications, social media posts, CitizensNet, press releases, and media coverage in newspapers and on the radio. Neighborhood associations have also assisted in getting the word out about meetings and other opportunities for property owners to make their voices heard.

Project Steps

The development of Design Guidelines is a multi-step process that includes data analysis, gathering input from the community, refining the community's wishes for each historic district, crafting a strategy, and creating the design guidelines document for each historic district.

Step 1: Assessment and Vision

Winter & Company gathered and analyzed vast amounts of technical data about each of the seven historic districts. They identified neighborhood characteristics, building trends, and how each district has (or has not) changed over time. Property owners and stakeholders are also identifying key neighborhood characteristics and issues, as well as what they want for their individual historic district, during community workshops and online surveys. In some cases, the direction from property owners is clear. A "Visual Preferences Survey" in January 2017 will clarify any remaining questions about what the community wants.

Step 2: Strategy Paper

Based on the data and community input gathered, Winter & Company will develop a Strategy Paper that includes an outline of the Design Guidelines, as well as the approach for addressing various issues that must be addressed when considering what is compatible with each historic district. The Strategy Paper will be presented for public comment and to City Council in February 2017.

Step 3: Draft Design Guidelines

Each guidelines document will go through an initial draft, revisions, an interim draft, more revisions, and the final draft for presentation to Council.

Step 4. Adoption

Each design guidelines document will be presented to the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission for review, and then to City Council for consideration before adoption. Public hearings will give property owners the opportunity to be heard.

For More Information

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