

Houston Heights Design Guidelines (August 2017 Draft): What's Changed?

The first public draft of the Houston Heights Design Guidelines was released in June 2017. We received comments from property owners, builders, Realtors, and people who do not live in the historic districts. Many of the comments we received focused on the measurable standards. We also conducted usability evaluations with Planning staff, commissioners, architects, and members of the community. This helped us identify issues with the way information was organized and located in the draft design guidelines.

Here are the major changes in which we think most people will be interested.

1. Organization of the document

- a. All of the “rules” (ordinance language and explanations) are provided at the beginning of the document. The Mandatory Approvals criteria and illustrations are also in Section 1, so that readers can determine immediately if their project meets those criteria or not. All of the relocation and demolition information is also in this section.
- b. The measurable standards, and the qualitative design guidelines to them, are all in a single section (5), instead of appearing in multiple sections.
- c. The sections are organized by type of project (alterations, additions, new construction) instead of by contributing or noncontributing status of the subject property.
- d. Some information was formatted to be more clear or explicit.

2. Measurable standards

- a. Added a process for property owners to request the use of different numbers based on the contributing buildings in their context area. (See page 4-3.)

3. Lot coverage

- a. Now excludes up to 400 square feet for a detached garage (was 250 square feet).
- b. Now excludes accessory buildings (whether conditioned or not).
- c. Now excludes all open or screened porches.

4. Floor Area Ratio

- a. Now excludes up to 400 square feet for a detached garage (up from 250 square feet) and an additional 400 square feet for a detached garage apartment.
- b. Now excludes all accessory buildings, whether conditioned or not.
- c. Also excludes all open or screened porches; this is not a change from the previous draft but was not clearly expressed.
- d. The new draft now clearly explains how attics are counted in FAR. The FAR calculation now excludes attics in existing contributing buildings. Attics in noncontributing buildings, additions, or new construction are excluded if they do not have dormers (i.e., do not appear to be living space).

5. Front setbacks

- a. Added instructions for calculating the front setback range for the context area.

Changes to Houston Heights Design Guidelines, August 2017 Draft (continued)

6. Side setbacks

- a. Decreased the minimum side setback for a one-story new building or addition from 15 feet to 10 feet.
- b. Minimum cumulative side setback for a two-story new building or addition stays the same at 15 feet.
- c. If the existing building has a side setback less than 5 feet, an addition can match the existing building or be 3 feet, whichever is greater.
- d. Clarified that the side setback is measured from the property line to the point on the building which is closest to the property line, and is the same for the entire side of the building.

7. Side wall lengths and insets

- a. Updated graphic to clarify that an inset is required on both sides of a building.

8. Plate height

- a. Plate heights for additions may match the plate heights of the existing building (whatever those are) or may be lower.
- b. Eliminated plate height limits for new one-story buildings.
- c. Increased plate heights for new construction from 9 feet to 10 feet for the first floor and from 8 feet to 9 feet for the second floor.

9. Eave height

- a. Decreased maximum eave height for one-story buildings from 14 feet at the 5-foot side setback to 12 feet. The previous numbers did not make sense, mathematically.
- b. Eave height can increase as side setback increases, with a maximum of 14 feet (was 16 feet).
- c. Second-story eave height numbers did not change.

10. Detached Garage Ridge Height

- a. Increased the maximum height for a two-story garage from 25 feet to 26 feet.