

City of Houston Historic Districts Design Guidelines

Community Meetings in Freeland, Norhill, Old Sixth Ward, and
Woodland Heights Historic Districts

April–June 2016

Steph McDougal, project manager

Background

In Fall 2015, the City of Houston began work to develop historic preservation design guidelines for the three Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South). During the contract negotiation process, that project was expanded to include four additional historic districts in Phase 1: Freeland Historic District, Norhill Historic District, Old Sixth Ward Historic District, and Woodland Heights Historic District. A second phase, starting in 2017, will produce design guidelines for Main Street Market Square Historic District and Glenbrook Valley Historic District.

To bring the additional four Phase 1 districts up to speed, introductory community meetings were held in each of those districts. Project manager Steph McDougal led each meeting, providing informational materials and introductory comments about the status of the project to date and the expansion to include the additional districts. She also discussed the design guidelines development process and the specific areas where property owners would be asked to provide input, based on the ordinance amendments. A summary of each meeting follows.

Freeland Historic District (April 12, 2016)

Organized by Jean Taylor, the meeting was held in the home of Denise Batchelor. Eleven people attended, representing nine of the 38 properties in the district. The opportunity to define *context area* (the area with which proposed projects will be compared for compatibility) was of particular interest to this group, which indicated that the district may consider including all 38 properties in its context area.

Old Sixth Ward Historic Conservation Committee (April 13, 2016)

Eight people attended this meeting, held at the home of Ryan Boehner. The Old Sixth Ward Historic District already has design guidelines, but they have been rendered largely outdated by ordinance amendments since they were developed in 2008. This meeting provided an opportunity for the Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association's Historic Conservation Committee to ask technical questions regarding the design guidelines development process.

Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association (May 16, 2016)

Ms. McDougal also presented at a regular OSWNA meeting. Sixteen property owners, as well as Houston City Council member Karla Cisneros and her chief of staff, Mario Castillo, were in attendance. A guest speaker and a representative from the Washington Avenue Arts Council were present as well. Questions included:

- What are the consultants' qualifications?
- How will we make sure that our historic district's unique characteristics are preserved, if we are going through the design guidelines process with other districts?
- What alterations require a COA?
- Can we include a district boundary expansion in this process? (No)
- Will our comments be anonymous/confidential? (All comments are scrubbed of personally identifying information, but once anonymized, they become part of the public record.)

Norhill Historic District (June 15, 2016)

Fourteen property owners (along with Councilmember Cisneros) attended this meeting. Several participants expressed concern that the meeting was lightly attended and that many people in the neighborhood might not participate in the process. Members of the Norhill Neighborhood Association responded that they have been working for more than a year to inform property owners and encourage them to become involved in the process of developing design guidelines, which this neighborhood has been requesting for some time. Attendees also wanted to know whether/how their deed restrictions would be reflected in the design guidelines, and how conflicts between deed restrictions and the City's preservation ordinance would be handled.

Woodland Heights Historic District (June 20, 2016)

Ten property owners attended this meeting; Councilmember Cisneros was also present. Attendees primarily asked questions about deed restrictions, the content of the design guidelines, and the process by which the guidelines would be adopted.

Any questions or comments about the design guidelines project? Please contact project manager Steph McDougal at 832-393-6541 or steph.mcdougal@houstontx.gov.