PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

# Historic District Design Guidelines: "Context Area"

## What is a Context Area?

As defined in the 2015 historic preservation ordinance, a context area is "the blockface and the opposing blockface within the district where the proposed activity is located. Context area may include a different geographic area if the commission finds that unusual and compelling circumstances exist **or that the context area is described different in design guidelines**."


This image (left) shows how a context area would be defined in practice. The star represents a proposed project or activity in a historic district. The white line surrounds the context area, as defined in the ordinance.

*Blocks* are one or more lots, tracts, or parcels of land bounded by streets, easements, rights-of-way, or other physical features (or a combination of these).

The *blockface* where this example is located would be the west side of Rutland, between 14th and 15th Streets. A blockface consists of the portion of the block that abuts the street; in this case, that's the side of the street on which the project is located. The opposite side of the street is called the *opposing blockface*.

Blockfaces do not continue past the end of the block.

## How are Context Areas used in the City of Houston historic preservation ordinance, as amended in 2015?

The 2015 historic preservation ordinance refers to *the context area* in a number of places involving Certificates of Appropriateness (COA). A property owner who wants to alter the exterior of a building in a historic district, build an addition, build new construction, relocate a building, or demolish a building, must apply for and receive a COA before doing that work. The COA process enables the City to protect and maintain the historic character of historic districts. When reviewing an application for a COA, the Planning staff and Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission will consider whether the proposed project is compatible with existing buildings *in the context area*.