

# **Houston Heights Historic Districts Design Guidelines**

Community Meeting #3

February 16, 2016

Steph McDougal, project manager

## Meeting Summary

The third public meeting for the Houston Heights Historic Districts design guidelines project was held on Tuesday, February 16, 2016, in the Parish Hall of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church at 1819 Heights Boulevard. The meeting was publicized through the City of Houston Planning and Development Department website, CitizensNet, and an email message to an existing mailing list of Heights property owners. An earlier letter mailed to all property owners in the three Houston Heights historic districts included information about the meeting, as well as all future meeting dates, and encouraged people to attend.

The meeting was scheduled from 5:30-7:30 p.m. and was divided into three parts: a presentation by project manager Steph McDougal, a general question-and-answer period, and time for participants to share their feedback and ask questions of individual planning staff. The presentation portion began at 5:35 p.m., to accommodate latecomers, and lasted for about 30 minutes. This was followed by approximately 20 minutes of questions and answers, at which time the organized portion of the meeting concluded, and participants were encouraged to share their feedback.

Thirty-five people attended the meeting (exclusive of Planning staff). Attendance declined by 23% from the first meeting to the second meeting, and by an additional 23% from the second meeting to this one. However, all three Houston Heights historic districts were represented, with Houston Heights East continuing to have the highest number of residents in attendance.

- Houston Heights East (18 attendees)
- Houston Heights West (3 attendees)
- Houston Heights South (8 attendees)
- Builders, architects, or Realtors who are not historic district property owners (4)
- Others who are not historic district property owners (1)

District	# Properties	% of All 3 Districts	# Attendees	% of All Attendees
Heights East	778	38%	18	30%
Heights West	517	25%	3	5%
Heights South	770	37%	8	13%

Seven people who attended the first two meetings also attended this meeting; 13 attended either the first or second meeting, but not both; and 15 attendees were new participants in this process.

In addition to paper copies of the February project newsletter, all handouts from the previous meeting were provided at this meeting. These included a map of all 22 locally designated historic districts in the City of Houston, a summary of the 2015 amendments to the historic preservation ordinance, a flowchart explaining the Certificate of Appropriateness application process, a handout explaining context areas, and the January newsletter.

## **Presentation**

This meeting's presentation included an update on project status and an explanation of *massing*.

### Project Status Update

The project is on schedule.

The Request for Proposals process is underway to hire a consulting team that will produce the design guidelines document for the Houston Heights Historic Districts; evaluations of proposals received are in progress, and the City will announce the selected vendor as soon as possible.

In advance of the consulting team being selected, the community survey planned for March is on hold. Similarly, it is possible that the community meeting schedule may change.

An Advisory or Steering Committee will include three property owners from each Heights historic district, plus three building professionals and Bill Pellerin, land use committee chair for the Houston Heights Association. Almost all volunteers have been from Houston Heights Historic District East, so Planning staff will identify and recruit other members from the South and West districts as needed.

### Massing

Members of the community have indicated that the concept of *massing* is often confusing and difficult for them to understand. Ms. McDougal provided an explanation of massing, accompanied by PowerPoint slides illustrating key concepts.

## **Questions and Answers**

During the question-and-answer period, attendees asked questions related to massing, as well as:

Q. How will the design guidelines deal with deed restrictions?

*A: The design guidelines will refer to the presence of deed restrictions in the Heights and direct property owners to consult with the Houston Heights Association for more information.*

Q. Will the consultants be provided with information about deed restrictions, Minimum Lot Size restrictions, etc., including maps?

*A: Yes. The consultants will receive all of the pertinent information that the City has available regarding the historic districts.*

Q. Do you think this project will be completed, given the Mayor's announcement about budget cuts?

*A: This project is required by ordinance. Unless that changes, the project will proceed as planned. Funding for this project is already in-hand through the Historic Preservation Fund, which can only be used for historic preservation purposes.*

## **Feedback from the Community**

At the end of this meeting, attendees were asked to provide input to several questions. This data is anecdotal and should not be assumed to represent the entire community.

### **Question 1. What restrictions do you want to see in the design guidelines?**

Five attendees provided comments:

- “Remove restriction on replacing windows on front of house so long as new windows match historical ones.”
- “I am sorry to see the ditches piped and turned into parking spaces. However, the city is the worst offender ([for example, on] Cortlandt [between] 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street) and has no business policing this. It should be voluntary with maybe some public debate.”
- “Careful consideration in context area and massing.”
- “Reflective metal roofs—they are a hazard and a nuisance.”
- “What about how many trees to be included on the property?”
- “What about the size of the lot compared to the house size?”

The next two questions involve fences and free-standing signs, which are exempt from the COA process, but the historic preservation ordinance allows a historic district to remove those and other items from the list of exemptions, if the community wishes to do so. Requiring such items to go through the regular COA process would allow the public to have input. At this meeting, the community was asked to indicate whether they thought fences and signs should be considered for possible removal from the exemptions list.

### **Question 2. Should fences be included in the design guidelines?**

- No more than 10 attendees indicated their interest in exploring whether or not the design of fences should be included in these design guidelines.
- Two comments indicated that only front-yard fences should be considered for inclusion in the design guidelines; back-yard fences should still be exempt from COA.

### **Question 3. Should free-standing signs be included in the design guidelines?**

- No more than 10 attendees indicated their interest in exploring whether or not the design of fences should be included in these design guidelines.
- Attendees shared two comments: (1) [signs should be included]” only if electrified/illuminated” and (2) “Yes – type, size, height and illumination for residential and commercial” should be included.