

# **Houston Heights Historic Districts Design Guidelines**

Community Meeting #4

April 26, 2016

Steph McDougal, project manager

## Meeting Summary

The fourth public meeting for the Houston Heights Historic Districts design guidelines project was held on Tuesday, April 6, 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. Project manager Steph McDougal gave a short presentation to update attendees on the status of the project. This was followed by a question-and-answer period. 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.

Twenty-six people attended the meeting, including Margaret Wallace-Brown, deputy director of Planning and Development; Planning Commission member Bill Baldwin; and Houston Archeological and Historical Commission members Emily Ardoin, Minnete Boesel, and Brie Kelman. The remaining 21 attendees were almost all from Houston Heights Historic District East, which has been the district best represented at these meetings since the outset of this project. Several people from the Norhill Neighborhood Association also attended, as this project has been expanded to include the Norhill, Woodland Heights, Freeland, and Old Sixth Ward Historic Districts.

- Houston Heights East (12 attendees)
- Houston Heights West (1 attendee)
- Houston Heights South (3 attendees)
- Norhill Historic District (3 attendees)
- Builders, architects, or Realtors who are not historic district property owners (0)
- Others who are not historic district property owners (0)

District	# Properties	% of All 3 Districts	# Attendees	% of All Attendees
Heights East	778	38%	12	48%
Heights West	517	25%	1	4%
Heights South	770	37%	3	12%

Eleven people at this meeting have attended at three of the four meetings so far, and 10 attendees were new participants in this process.

All handouts from previous meetings were provided, including 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, February, and March newsletters.

## **Presentation**

Project manager Steph McDougal made a brief presentation about the status of the project to date.

### Project Status Update

The City received three qualified proposals in response to its Request for Proposals for design guidelines consulting firms. Because the contracting process is not yet complete, the selected vendor could not be announced at the meeting. An announcement will be forthcoming as soon as possible.

Based on the selected proposal, the project scope has been expanded to include not only the three Houston Heights Historic Districts (East, West, and South) for which design guidelines are mandated, but also six additional districts. During Phase 1, the vendor will develop a single design guidelines document for the three Houston Heights Historic Districts, as well as a set of design guidelines for each of the following historic districts: Norhill, Freeland, Woodland Heights, and Old Sixth Ward. (Although design guidelines were previously developed for Old Sixth Ward, they are now out of date.) Phase 2, which will begin in 2018, will produce design guidelines for the Main Street/Market Square and Glenbrook Valley Historic Districts.

Because the Heights-area historic districts and Old Sixth Ward are fairly similar, in terms of architecture and patterns of community development, the City can realize a significant cost savings by including all seven districts in Phase 1. Efficiencies include having the consulting team complete on-site fieldwork for all seven districts during the same trip(s) and holding community workshops together, where property owners in all seven districts can hear the same presentation before breaking out into groups to work by district. The consulting team has extensive experience working with multiple historic districts at once, and this will in no way dilute or minimize the attention that each historic district receives from the team.

Because of the expanded project scope, the Advisory Committee will now include one representative from each historic district, plus three building professionals and Bill Baldwin, representing the Mayor's transition team. Not all committee members had been selected at the time of the meeting, so that line-up will be announced separately.

Ms. McDougal noted that the consulting team will be holding focus groups and stakeholder interviews, and she will provide the consultants with the names of all of the people who previously volunteered for the Advisory Committee. However, because most volunteers were from Houston Heights East, it is possible that not everyone who volunteered will be selected. That will be left up to the consultants. Ms. McDougal reminded everyone that, regardless of whether they are participating on the Advisory Committee or in another way, anyone can provide input to the project at any time. Several people have written long letters or sent email messages of various lengths with both questions and comments, and all are welcomed and will be provided to the consultants. In addition, all comments received so far will be published to the project webpage. (Personally identifying information will be removed first, and comments may be lightly edited to correct spelling and punctuation, for better readability.)

## **Questions and Answers**

During the question-and-answer period, attendees asked questions including:

Q. How will the design guidelines deal with reversibility (Norhill)?

*A: Inappropriate alterations have made to a building often result in it being classified as noncontributing. If reversed, the building may be reclassified as contributing. The design guidelines can include general information about typical inappropriate alterations within a historic district and how those might be appropriately reversed.*

Q. Will the design guidelines include information about Norhill's deed restrictions?

*A: Although the City of Houston does not oversee deed restrictions, previous design guidelines have directed property owners to consult with the applicable neighborhood association to determine whether deed restrictions apply to their property. If a specific historic district wishes to include more prescriptive information about their deed restrictions, we can make sure the consultants are aware of that and ask for their guidance on how best to proceed.*

Q. Given that the contracting process has gone on longer than expected, will the 16-month deadline for completing the Houston Heights Historic Districts design guidelines be extended?

*A: While scheduling contingencies have been discussed, we will have to see when City Council actually approves the contract in order to understand exactly how the schedule will be affected.*

## **Feedback from the Community**

No specific feedback was solicited from participants during this meeting.