

Houston Heights Historic Districts Design Guidelines

Community Meeting #3
February 16, 2016



PLANNING &
DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT

Agenda

Brief Recap

- Welcome
- Project purpose, scope, status update

Massing

- What it is and how it's used in historic preservation

Feedback Stations

- Please share your comments!

Thank you for all the great input we are receiving!

PROJECT UPDATE

Project Plan & Schedule

Phase I

- City solicits proposals from qualified consulting firms/teams and hires a vendor: November 2015 – March 2016
- City gathers input from property owners: December 2015 – March 2016

Phase II

- Consultants gather input from community, do their work: May – September 2016

Phase III

- City tests usability of draft design guidelines: September 2016
- Consultants present revised design guidelines, gather feedback: October 2016
- Design guidelines go to HAHC: (estimated) December 2016

The project is currently on schedule.

Project Status

- Proposals are in; City is in the vendor evaluations process
- Community survey – on hold pending vendor selection
- Community meeting schedule may change
- Steering committee – almost all volunteers from East; will need to recruit

Community input is the
cornerstone of this project.

MASSING

What is Massing?

VOLUME



ARRANGEMENT OF FORMS



Fig. A

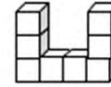


Fig. B

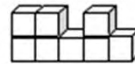


Fig. C



Fig. D

Massing is a combination of volume (height x width x depth) plus the arrangement of forms within the building. In the graphic to the right, all of these shapes are made up of eight cubes, so they have the same volume. However, the cubes are arranged in different ways. We can think of these as buildings.

The City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance requires additions and new construction to be similar to surrounding contributing buildings in terms of massing (among other things). If a historic district was made up of mostly Figure A shapes, and someone wanted to construct a new building there, a Figure D shape would not be compatible – it does not have similar massing, because the building shapes are arranged differently, even though it is the same volume as a Figure A.



Here are examples of four different houses in the Houston area, all about the same size -- 2400 square feet -- but the way that volume is arranged is very different. In large part, that's because they were built in different decades, and the design of each house reflects changing tastes and trends in architecture. That's the same thing that happens in historic districts.

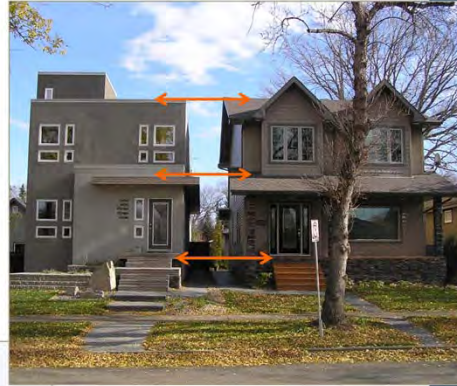
- The 1965 example is low and long with strong diagonal elements, very typical of the Mid-Century Modern period in which it was built.
- The 1980s example is a style that our standard guide to architectural styles for historic preservation (Virginia McAlester's *Field Guide to American Houses*) calls "New Traditional," and this is the Colonial Revival version. Built between 1935 and today, this style is often easy to identify by the composition of the façade and simplified architectural details. For example, an actual Colonial Revival house from the 1920s would have had a symmetrical façade, with windows that mostly matched each other in size and shape. This façade is asymmetrical with an assortment of different windows.
- Built in the 2000s, the "Millenium Mansion" has been the predominant style in American subdivisions from late 1980s to the present. Vertical massing allows more square footage within the same footprint than a one-story ranch home. This style is characterized by a complex high-pitched roof and tall (often two-story) dominant entry way; a variety of window shapes and sizes; and multiple wall cladding materials.
- The 2015 home is modern and comprised of highly simplified forms, with minimal decorative details.



We can look at those houses another way -- in terms of the building blocks that are put together to create those volumes. This is what we mean when we talk about the arrangement of forms in a building and how that contributes to massing. Massing can be simple – as in the 1985 and 2015 examples, or complex – in the 2005 example.

HEIGHT

- Ridge Height
- Plate Height (top of first story)
- Height of Porch Roof
- Foundation Height



Each of the dimensions in the volume also contributes to the overall effect. First let's talk about height.

The bottom left image shows infill construction on the left, which is much larger than the existing houses. Even though the house on the right is two stories, the foundation height and first-story height is similar to the one-story house in the middle.

In the upper right image, the new house on the left has been designed to match its neighbor's height at these key points.

WIDTH

- Appropriate to size of lot
- Projecting forms break up otherwise monolithic surface



Both of these homes, which are contributing buildings in Houston historic districts, are very wide. This is all right because they are set on large lots. While they are much wider than would be appropriate for Heights-area historic districts, they are perfectly appropriate for their own historic districts.

Along with the large lots on which they are located, the forms of these buildings help to make the width of these houses less dramatic. The house in the top image has a bay window, a dominant front gable wall, a chimney, and a part of the house that is set back, on the left-hand side of this photo. The house in the lower image is even wider, but its front façade is broken up by the overhanging porch roof; the second story over the garage (rear left of this photo) draws your eye in the same direction as the porch, which also makes the width seem less extreme.

HEIGHT X WIDTH X FORM

- Relative to neighboring building
- Effect of each factor is amplified by the others



Here's an example where height, width, and form all combine to create a building that's very dissimilar in massing compared with neighboring houses. In this case, the small house in the upper image was replaced by the very large house in the lower image.

The new house is significantly taller and wider than its neighbors, and the effect of both of these dimensions are amplified by nearly flat front elevation with large solid wall spaces and windows. Minimizing any one of these elements would have helped to make this house seem less massive.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Ways to Receive Information

- Visit the project website at <http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/Design-Guidelines-Heights.html>
- Sign up for our monthly newsletter on project website
- Get automatic updates via Citizensnet
Sign up at <http://cohapp.cityofhouston.gov/citizensnet/>

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