

CITY OF HOUSTON

HOUSTON HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

Public Comments Received October 2015 – March 2016

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
10/26/15	It was very nice to speak to you today and learn more about the process you are undertaking for the development and creation of Historic District Design Guidelines for the three Heights historic districts. Please add me to your contact list as I would very much like to stay informed throughout the process. If there is anything I can do to help as you reach out to our neighbors to get their input, please let me know. I look forward to meeting!	Added to contact list.
11/3/15	I'm looking at the new Historic Preservation Ordinance #2015-967 and have a question regarding Section 33-266(c)(Division 5. Design Guidelines, Application). This section relates to the specific timeframe required to present design guidelines for the Heights East, Heights West, and Heights South historic districts. My question relates to the remaining portion of this section – “. . . after which time, the design guidelines previously submitted to the director shall be automatically adopted for any of the districts mentioned in this section for which design guidelines have not been adopted by city council.” What are the “design guidelines previously submitted to the director” and does this apply to the three Heights Districts? Thanks.	Explained that this references the 2008 informational design guide which was developed by Jonathan Smulian and a steering committee, but not formally adopted by the City. The 2010 historic preservation ordinance amendments rendered that document obsolete. The current project schedule has been developed to ensure that new design guidelines for the three Heights districts will be adopted before the Feb. 2017 deadline.
11/6/15	I am wondering where you are in the process of the Guideline review for the Heights. I was at the Land Use meeting last night and there seems to be some confusion on the process of when Public meetings will take place. Will there be stakeholder meetings in the interim or are you just surveying by phone. Bill Pellerin was wondering how everyone will be contacted to be able to participate in the process. Will there actually be a mail out notification to all the Historic District residents. Please update me on where the process is currently and what the next steps are. Also, is there any timeline on the other districts? I know the Norhill Historic District has been working gathering surveys as to what the residents want to see based on their deed restrictions vs the Historic Ordinance. Also, the Old Sixth Ward is working	Explained that community engagement will include meetings, email blasts, newsletter, webpage, flyers, as well as several mailings to property owners and residents. Described RFP process and content of main scope of work and three alternatives.

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	toward revisions on their guidelines. How will the order of the other districts be determined?	
11/16/15	I just want to be sure we can go beyond the Smulian design guidelines as I think there are many issues not covered in the Smulian design guidelines that now need to be addressed.	Responded that I concur.
12/2/15	Voice mail message: Caller owns a post-war/early 1940s cottage on Heights Blvd, "in so-so repair on a huge lot." It is contributing. He had lunch with Randy Pace who told him maybe it should be non-contributing. He has been trying to sell it, but feels that he is having trouble because the house cannot be demolished. He bought the house when he lived in the house next door, in order to protect the property where he resided. He was concerned about having a commercial use next door and placed deed restrictions on the property.	Returned his call.
12/7/15	<p>Notes from phone call: Caller attended an HAHC meeting in August to find out how the process works. Observed a demolition request where there was "a lot of animosity. You could tell that the applicant had been there before. They had their lawyer there! We wondered what in the world was going on. One of the committee members, a lady with gray hair, stood up and said something like, "I don't care what information you present, I will not vote to demolish a historic house." I thought that was a problem on the committee, if they have the attitude that they just won't do it."</p> <p>Caller and his wife inherited a house from the wife's uncle, who died at home at age 96 after living there for 43 years. "He had no money and had not done any repairs that entire time. We supported him. Now we inherited the house and we're trying to sell it, but it's been a year and we haven't had an offer. We lowered the price, but a realtor brought someone in recently and they said it was too much work and they didn't want to have to deal with the historic district and the city. We applied to demolish the house. We had a structural engineer tell us that it was condemned; well, not condemned, but it had to be torn down. It could not be fixed."</p> <p>"The city staff has been nice and polite. They are doing their job. They told us that they would recommend denial and gave us a lot of information for more things to include in our application. We were on the agenda for November but we pulled the application and will come back in January. It's been a negative experience, especially the meeting in August. One of the commissioners told us that there are times when the demolition criteria, in his opinion, have been met but the commission won't abide by those rules. That's a problem. We also heard that if we get an offer for anything, even \$1, in the committee's mind that's a reasonable</p>	<p>Took notes. Thanked the caller for providing this information and said I would pass it along. Noted that there was probably more going on at the August meeting than he might have been aware of, particularly if the applicant had been there before. Shared the data on the small percentage of demolition COA applications as well as the very high percentage of COA approved at the first meeting. Explained that the purpose of a historic district is to maintain those properties that contribute, so it is very hard to get permission to demolish a contributing structure. Encouraged him to continue working with staff.</p> <p>Note: A review of the</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	offer. Even if you lose money. We are pretty discouraged.”	caller’s application for demolition revealed that the caller’s own market value appraisal was priced at more than \$100,000 less than the price to which the property had been reduced. The original price was even higher.
12/8/15	Comments at meeting: “Can parking in front of houses be restricted? Why can’t we control traffic in the Heights with lower speed limits, especially at 14 th and Yale? People are running stop signs and stop lights.” Asked for a map of the historic district.	Sent maps of all three historic districts via email and snail mail.
12/8/15	<p>Design guidelines – compatible with Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation.</p> <p>Funding? National Trust for Historic Preservation Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties (U.S. Dept. of the Interior)</p> <p><u>Introduction</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent of Design Guidelines: “Historic preservation is not about slowing or hindering development, but rather not overlooking the value of what we already have.” • Purpose of historic preservation • Value of historic district designation • Purpose of design guidelines: “Provide direction on preserving the integrity of the community’s historic resources through compatible (massing, size, scale, architectural features) new construction and alteration.” • Provide a basis for making informed, consistent decisions about proposed new construction and alterations to buildings and sites in the community. <p>The historic design review process utilizes design guidelines to guide consistent review of applications for major modifications to existing buildings or the construction of new structures.</p> <p>Design guidelines should be written so that they can be used by both the layman and qualified design and planning professionals, to plan improvements including architects and preservation consultants.</p> <p>Terms and concepts should be defined and explained – highlight terms found in a Glossary.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>Secretary of Interior’s standards for rehabilitation – general guidance for work on any historic building. The Ten Standards.</p> <p>Sustainability – as applies to historic districts – to maintain the character of neighborhoods while enhancing their livability and maintaining them in active use.</p> <p>New construction within historic districts should be compatible with both the immediate context in which the new construction is located, as well as the overall character of the neighborhood.</p> <p>The three Houston Heights Historic Districts have some visual characteristics that are common to all three, but there are some distinct differences that should be addressed and accounted for.</p> <p>The guidelines for each district should contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A map indicating the boundary of the district and those properties designated as contributing and noncontributing to the historic character of the district. • A statement of significance • A description of the neighborhood • Design goals • Policy • Guidelines for unique design considerations, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Building orientation ○ Site coverage ○ Parking ○ Streetscape ○ Landscaping ○ Fences <p>Indicate what is generally appropriate. Use both text and photo/graphics; number conditions for reference.</p> <p>Indicate what is generally not appropriate – use both text and photos/graphics; number conditions for reference. Indicate common styles, basic house treatments, and sustainability. Use text and photos/graphics.</p> <p>Indicate green features typically found on historic buildings in the district – photos/graphics – i.e., porches, roof pitch, double hung windows, mature trees.</p> <p>Provide suggested treatments for basic elements of the historic house and order of appropriateness.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>1. Identify, retain and preserve 2. Protect and maintain 3. Repair 4. Replace</p> <p>Elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exterior siding • Roofs • Windows • Entrances and porches • Site design/landscaping <p>Provide preservation guidelines that focus on green building design and other aspects of sustainability as it relates to historically significant buildings, sites, and districts.</p> <p>Focus on the sustainable benefits of preservation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental: building materials, building energy savings, climate design solutions, embodied energy, construction quality. • Economic: Use existing assets, tourism, job creation • Cultural/social: Maintain a connection to the community's heritage – neighborly <p>Consider basic sustainability principles for both historic properties and non-contributing structures.</p> <p>Provide steps for developing an efficiency strategy for development within a historic district. Provide a non-invasive strategy for weatherization improvement with appropriate examples, photos, graphics.</p> <p>Address maintaining a resource's historic integrity while adding energy-generating technology, i.e., locate roof solar panels set back from the primary façade.</p> <p>Address landscape and site improvement strategies for sustainability; examples, photos, graphics.</p> <p>Provide design guidelines for additions to existing buildings. Purpose -- New additions – policy – what is appropriate – what is not appropriate. Examples, photos, graphics. Address addition massing – what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.</p> <p>Provide guidelines for new building design in historic districts that reinforce the social fabric of the neighborhood by conveying a sense of connection with it.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>Design guidelines should contain environmental impacts to neighbors –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate/not appropriate height-to-width ratios, graphics • Mass and form • Orientation and lot coverage (definitions) • Alignment, rhythm and spacing • Setback • Materials • Windows, doors, and façade treatment • Roof forms and materials • Trim and details • Energy generating equipment <p>Provide guidelines for accessory buildings, accessory dwelling units, and garages -- definitions</p> <p>Provide suggested considerations to follow when requesting a C of A.</p> <p>Provide an extensive glossary; when in doubt if a definition is required, add it.</p> <p>Provide a bibliography and selected resources.</p> <p>Address differences in look for use?</p> <p>If an exact dimension is in a criterion – provide the acceptable range and maximum deviation.</p>	
12/9/15	<p>It was a helpful meeting in clarifying the objectives of the initiative you are leading. With two rather extreme positions here in the Heights, it will certainly be interesting to see what the end product will be. It was somewhat disappointing to hear that the only options are to make the restrictions set by the ordinance even more restrictive in our district.</p> <p>As a new Houston Heights Association board member and the owner of a contributing structure in Heights South that we completed in 2013, I know firsthand the challenges of restoration and renovation under the historic commission guidelines. I hope the new ones --especially when modified with the district guidelines -- do not make the process more onerous. We went in with a very positive attitude about the project. Along the way, we experienced multiple long construction delays and unreasonable</p>	<p>Responded via email. Clarified that the design guidelines will not only impose new rules but will also enable district residents to clarify how ordinance is applied to that district. Also encouraged her to share feedback about the COA process for possible future improvements.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>requests such as rebuilding heavily damaged windows, each requiring onsite visits and issue escalation. Surely the new processes are an improvement.</p> <p>Many of us moved to the Heights for the history and the sense of community. I love the eclectic nature of the Heights - the people and the architecture. I've told many people it's as close as I can get to living in Austin here in Houston. We cannot make it so difficult that no one wants to live in the historic districts because they cannot live in a rundown house and the process is too frustrating for them renovate. I know of a number of builders who also refuse to build in an historic district now. Our renovation was a positive contribution to the neighborhood even with the added square footage. You wouldn't know it was 3,600sf from looking at it from the street. This is the way an expansion should be done. I welcome you to visit if it would be helpful. We are at [address].</p> <p>Thank you for taking on this project!</p>	
12/9/15	<p>For situations like I described above where there are no contributing structures left on a blockface, and other situations where there are non-contributing structures sandwiched in between two massive recently constructed houses, can design guidelines be less restrictive for these lots since streetscape has already been altered and there is no historic flow to preserve?</p> <p>I read the Germantown design guidelines and in my opinion, the only portion the document that clearly clarifies massing is on page 12. I think this sheet does a really good job of visually explaining why bigger houses next to smaller contributing house don't work. BUT, Germantown has a much higher contributing structure percentage than the Heights has. I hope that the design consultants take that into consideration and when writing the "size" page, provide examples not only of large proposed houses next to small houses disturbing the flow, but also show large existing houses on all sides of a new proposed house, and show how the flow is not disturbed. It is only fair that it works both ways.</p> <p>Comment #3a) Section 33-201 of the new HPO has given the design guidelines the ability to clarify the definition of "Context Area" if unusual and compelling circumstances exist. I would like the design consultants to expand upon this, and clearly provide architectural guidelines for houses that are in situation as described in my Comment #3. I'm in favor of allowing the design guidelines to be less restrictive for houses sandwiches between largely massed new construction and I'm also in favor of having</p>	Returned his call.

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>less restrictive guidelines for houses that are on block faces with no contributing structures.</p> <p>Comment #4) Will the selection process for the design consultant be transparent. Specifically, can the public be allowed to see proposals from consultants and can the public be given the opportunity to provide feedback to the procurement team before a selection is made?</p> <p>Question #5) Can you email me the 1998 architectural design guidelines that were mentioned at the meeting today?</p> <p>Question #6) Corner lots that face north/west streets are allowed to be added on to in the back. That makes the house from the East/West street viewpoint over 100' wide. If these houses can be added on to and made over 100' wide from the east/west viewpoint, why can't that be considered when coming up with acceptable new construction widths for lots that face east/west streets.</p> <p>My specific example is [address]. I have attached a photo of this house from the East/West viewpoint. This situation is "typical" on east/west streets and happens in multiple locations across the neighborhood.</p> <p>I would like to see the design guidelines recognize that this situation is typical on east/west streets and have the consultants writing the restrictions on east/west street house widths take this into consideration. I'm in favor of allowing wider new construction houses on East/West streets because of this condition.</p>	
12/10/15	<p>I shall be sending you a bit of a paper (after I have written it, with some examples) on what I think the guidelines should address. From perspective of a 15-year resident of the Heights, the city changed the rules on us without our input. They created all these potentially contributing houses so that they could get the "historic" count high enough to make some nice districts, and had more lenient rules for the PCs than the Contributing. Then in one fell swoop, they later deemed the PCs to be Cs. A tremendous number of the PCs have little to no historical architectural features. A house that is little more than a shack should not be treated the same as a house that actually has architectural features from the period of significance.</p> <p>An alley separates my 15-year-old house, which is within the Houston Heights East Historical District, from the non-historical</p>	<p>Responded via email. Offered to provide more information about Potentially Contributing conversion. Also noted that historical and architectural significance requires knowledge of architectural history and the evolution of architectural styles, so someone might not realize that a small,</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>district. A builder bought a couple of lots and built two lot-line-to-lot-line houses, with two story garages on the alley -- just really gross and tacky examples that demonstrate the importance of having a historic district. But this needs to be tempered by not treating every Contributing structure in the same manner, due to the way in which these structures were ushered in to the Contributing classification and the wide variety of architectural features (from none to great) found within each structure. They were not all created "equally." I am of the opinion that just because it is old does not mean all of its nondescript features need to be retained, but if it is going to be renovated, they better be replaced with something that conforms to the style of the period.</p>	<p>modest house is actually a good example of minimal traditional style or Small House movement. Clarified that the Period of Significance for all three districts extends to 1941.</p>
<p>12/10/15</p>	<p>We went to the Planning Department’s meeting Tuesday night and found it interesting that your office is now working on setting up guidelines to help those who are subject to the historic preservation ordinance navigate the process as their specific situation requires. Seems like it will be very helpful!</p> <p>We just wanted to make you aware of a few of the conversations we had while there and to ask some follow-up questions.</p> <p>We met and briefly spoke with Ms. Margaret Wallace Brown. She mentioned that she was vaguely familiar with [our COA application], and wondered what the status of our application was. I informed her that we were resubmitting our application, after our conversation with you regarding some of our concerns regarding the misinformation that played a part in the staff recommendation to the commission for denial, providing clarifying materials/details.</p> <p>She then introduced us to one of the architects in attendance, asking him about whether he could do an appraisal just by visiting a property. He said plainly, “no,” that it would take a lot more than that and Ms. Wallace Brown excused herself as we began to discuss some of the details of our case with the architect.</p> <p>We spoke with [the architect] a bit more about [our property] and he had some interesting insights. Given his expertise, he said that one of the complicating factors of the property and any sort of attempt at renovation is its relatively small size – 4400 sq.ft. I understood this to mean that, with the restrictions of the historic preservation ordinance (e.g., keeping the first 30% of the structure the same when renovating), it would discourage investment – even by those who may be interested in historic</p>	<p>Note: Same commenter as 12/7</p> <p>This message was sent to a different Planner and was responded to by staff.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>preservation – because it just wouldn’t be possible to make something that would be a modest, modern home on the small lot. Conversely, if the structure were demolished, a modest, modern home that (1) would comply with the historic preservation ordinance and (2) buyers would be interested in, would be possible. This is another obvious reason why there is no interest in the house besides the “non-salvageable” status itself.</p> <p>A question for you that is related to this: would the new construction be able to be closer to the street? That would allow even more space for a new and much improved single family dwelling. The house next door, which is up for sale, I believe, is closer to the street.</p> <p>Lastly, we spoke with Ms. Diana DuCroz and let her know that we had once again lowered the asking price (now more than \$110,000 less than it was I initially listed for almost one year ago) and were planning to be prepared for the January meeting, if the property had not sold by then. She made the comment that January was only two months away and that wasn’t very long for it to be on the market at the new price. As you might imagine, this was very unsettling for me. How long does the property have to be on the market for your office to consider us to have made a reasonable effort to find a buyer and have been unsuccessful?</p> <p>So, again, I just wanted to make you aware of the conversations we had last night and a few of the questions/issues that arose. Please respond at your earliest convenience.</p>	
12/10/15	<p>I believe that you did a really good job with handling the meeting. What was obvious to me was that there were a number of unhappy people there with various complaints concerning the historic district and its rules. Even though that was not the focus of the night, I believe that the discontent in that room was strong. I wondered if you noticed that also. Since you are gathering info for the planning staff, this could be a point to note to them even though they were there. Would a meeting for the planning staff directly with the same people not be indicated? What about a survey of all the historic district owners on their opinion of governing rules on a scale of one to ten. How many other unhappy people are out there that could not come that night? I believe this feedback might be illuminating but I, unfortunately, don't see it having significant effect on the present status.of the committee's hard-line stance in general.</p>	<p>Note: Same commenter as above and 12/7.</p> <p>Responded via email and provided information about the 2010 reconsideration effort and results. Offered to send additional information if desired.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
12/14/15	<p>Notes from phone call: Caller has already spoken to a member of staff. Says that he has an old house that needs to be remodeled or torn down. Wants a recap of the designation process. Provided email and phone number.</p> <p>[Responded via email with information about the designation process, and 2010 reconsideration process. Because he owns rental property, also provided information about the City tax exemption, as well as the state and federal tax credit programs. Included a link to the project webpage.]</p>	Responded via email.
12/15/15	<p>With respect to the minimalist houses, I guess one person's junk can be considered another person's treasure. I am of the opinion that this junky treasure not be required to become an even bigger ugly monster in order to make it livable/attractive for a family of 4 or 5, and therefore we should take this into consideration in drawing up the guidelines - how can the historical significance of the "Small House Movement" be retained as the square footage is tripled in size? (thinking that may very well be an oxy moron or something like that)</p> <p>With respect to the conversion of the PCs to the Cs - I think it would be useful to you to understand this (I have my view point and getting the official rationale as to why this was rational will not change my view point) - from both the point of view of the folks who actually did it (who obviously believe it was a great idea and very sensible) and from the folks who were the recipient of what I am sure they believe was a unilateral reclassification (if they even know what happened). For sure they did not nominate their own properties to be reclassified. I personally was not impacted, I am just amazed as to how the city managed to cram that down on the residents and how individual homeowners, many of whom have the majority of their net worth tied up in their properties and also by the very nature of their culture/life style - had little to no knowledge of what was actually happening to them and even today probably don't know what happened - they thought they owned a nice big lot worth lots of money - and now they own a nice big lot worth less money).</p> <p>But again - I am supportive of the district - just think the turducken thing needs to be addressed in the revised guidelines and I would bet most of the future ones were PC's that got swept into the Contributing category.</p> <p>Pictures shall be forthcoming once I get the Christmas stuff under control.</p>	<p>Note: Same commenter as 12/10, regarding small houses.</p> <p>Responded via email to clarify that (per Diana DuCroz) Potentially Contributing and Contributing properties had been treated exactly the same way for COA purposes, so changing the classification did not impose any new restrictions on property owners. However, PC properties were not eligible for the tax exemption program, so the reclassification opened up that program for all of those properties.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
12/18/15	<p>Caller owns a contributing 1920s bungalow in HH South. Currently has GAF mineral board on the exterior of the house over shiplap, but only on the sides and back; original siding is visible on the front of the house. She wants to replace the GAF siding with Hardie. Caller reports that the house next door to her property previously had a bungalow, which was demolished several years ago. The new house built there “looks like something out of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco.” Caller said that, “We see people coming in who use this as an investment tool, and after 3-5 years, they move and leave us with their mess. For us long-term residents, it’s been really difficult.”</p> <p>Caller is concerned about the block-by-block minimum lot size and prevailing setback rules expiring after 20 years, which on her block would be in 2022. “I could be looking at eight condos across the street from me ... that would be a big problem.” Asked me to find out if those lots could be split and what could be built there.</p>	<p>Sent an email to the caller; while lots cannot be subdivided in the historic district, the preservation ordinance does not regulate land use, so multi-family housing such as condos could be built on the property in question.</p>
12/26/15	<p>First of all, thanks for endeavoring to gather as much input from the community as possible on this issue. I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the first meeting, but I'll try to attend upcoming ones. I've got them on the calendar.</p> <p>I'm not exactly sure what level of input folks who live in the heights are going to have. For example, if there was a lot of input you received to expand or scrap certain restrictions, would that matter, or is that controlled by city ordinance?</p> <p>If this is an opportunity for residents to give their input on what they'd like the community to look like going forward, here's my two cents-</p> <p>I think the historic designation has prevented a lot higher density townhomes from moving in. Whether this could have been accomplished with the deed restrictions alone, I don't know. I am happy I don't have to worry about 6 homes with a shared driveway going up next door where there used to be 1.</p> <p>I like that there is an attempt to maintain the character of a neighborhood. Installing a ranch next to a bungalow doesn't really look that good. That being said, what's being approved as historically appropriate that's 4,000 square feet+ seems disingenuous at times.</p> <p>Being required to keep windows or siding or doors that are original is very silly to me. I understand and support wanting to maintain a look, or the same construction materials. But simply because a single pane window is old does not make it</p>	<p>Responded via email. Provided examples of areas where we will be looking for input from the community. Explained that windows, siding, and doors are character-defining features and can be repaired, rather than replaced. Clarified that 92-94% of COA have been approved, mostly at the first meeting.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>worthwhile. If your window was painted shut and is no longer functioning because the window or your house is out of square due to settling, you're essentially stuck unless you want to go to lengths to repair the window. The amount of noise that single pane windows let through and the loss in heating/cooling efficiency is also frustrating.</p> <p>My only other concern is the HAHC. The lack of transparency in their decision making process, and the inability to deal with them without incurring quite a bit of cost for changes that seem minor could be better.</p> <p>I'm not sure if this helps you, but I thought I'd take a minute and weigh in.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
12/27/15	<p>Although I live in the Heights East Historic District, these suggestions could be applied to any historic district. By definition, a historic district is a place where history and character should be preserved. If persons do not agree with this concept they can live or do business outside of historic districts. Since the historic districts comprise only small geographic areas and Houston has only a limited stock of remaining historic structures, the city of Houston, the Planning Department, and its elected officials should make every effort to protect and preserve what remains for future generations.</p> <p>Suggestions for the Heights</p> <p>To protect the existing structures, space is required around them to allow for proper moisture control and maintenance. The original layout of these homes provided spacing between homes with front and back yards, side yards or driveways, pier and beam foundations, and alleys with permeable ground. These provide for proper drainage and sunlight and movement of air around structures which is one main reason these structures still exist, and creates the character of the area and allows for the mature trees.</p> <p>Guidelines should, therefore, include strict anterior, posterior, and side setbacks. Any new construction or add-ons should be no closer than five feet to side property lines or no closer than 10 feet from the adjacent home, whichever is a greater distance. There should be absolutely no exceptions to front setback. Several new homes in the Heights violate this setback even though it was part of the original requirements of the Historic District. A posterior or backyard setback would allow for a buffer of permeable ground behind homes so that water doesn't drain directly into the alley. Another way to look at this idea is that structures should comprise no more than a predetermined percentage of the available lot. This was utilized in Austin to prevent new "McMansion" construction that covers the entire lot and thereby damages adjacent structures. Any new construction or add-on could be required to obtain a drainage inspection to determine that water will not run off into adjacent properties.</p> <p>Alleys and ditches are part of the character of the Heights. The original homes had driveways and were not dependent on alleys for access. The new, oversized structures that take up the entire lot usually depend on alley access. In the Heights, therefore, the alleys should be treated in a manner that helps preserve the historic structures and those interests should take priority over new homes that desire alley access. Any work done on alleys needs to be inspected and approved by the Historic Commission.</p>	<p>Responded via email and thanked him for his input.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>Shell cover has been successfully used in the Heights, whereas concrete and asphalt, being non-permeable, create problems. Also, alleys should be lower than the lowest backyard, so as not to drain into homeowners' yards. Similarly, ditches are part of the character of the Heights. They provide effective drainage and water retention and a habitat for frogs and the yellow-crested night herons unique to the Heights. Paving over the ditches and adding curbs is counterproductive to the historic district, damages to the century-old trees, and actually worsens street flooding in the neighborhood.</p> <p>The foundation that has stood the test of time as is the most compatible with the subtropical climate of Houston and characterizes the Houston Heights is the pier-and-beam set into soil. Slab foundations do not in any form belong in the Heights. Slabs prevent water from seeping into the ground and cause moisture and run-off problems. A pier and beam on top of a slab will not stand the test of time and will cause problems to adjacent historic structures.</p> <p>Finally, teardowns and relocations should be avoided at all costs as they destroy the fabric of the historic district and bring in new, less compatible construction. Moving a house is usually very destructive to the home, especially, the roof and its supports. To help prevent teardowns, homeowners should be held responsible for keeping up their properties so they will not become teardowns, or eyesores to their neighbors.</p> <p>Appeals The opinion of the Historic Commission should be respected by the City of Houston and the Planning Department, since they have the expert knowledge to protect the historic districts. I don't think it is ethical or fair, for individuals to hire a lawyer and arbitrarily appeal the decision of the Historic Commission to the Planning Department. Over the last 2 years, the result of these appeals has been additional, oversized, incompatible new construction and further damage to the Heights Historic Districts. In summary, I believe we need to come together and commit to preservation in the Heights Historic Districts.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
12/30/15	<p>Thank you for clarifying. I had been told that the historic designation would not protect us from lot division. That is an important issue that City gov't and the HAHC should address. It will be impossible to retain the character of the neighborhood when neglected contributing structures are demolished and condos take their place. Once that happens, much of the preservationists' work will be negated. As I stated, there are three neglected homes on my block that will be slated for demolition, once sold, at some point in the future.</p> <p>In 2021, I can attempt to obtain the required amount of signatures to maintain our original 6600-square-foot lot sizes. It is increasing doubtful that I will get enough support to keep our historic and original lot size once the 20 years expires on the Prevailing Lot Sizes. You would be surprised to know how many homes on my block are now leased by absentee landlords using the Heights' properties as an investment. Due to the "growing pains" of the new historic guidelines, many of my neighbors are very anti-regulation. Hopefully, you and your colleagues can resolve these issues and once again gain support from the Heights' residents.</p> <p>I would like see new structures that are more compatible with the original architecture of the Heights (Victorian, Craftsman, Dutch colonial, etc.) The ordinance as originally approved seemed to give builders freedom to build and design whatever they wanted if a contributing home was deemed not salvageable. Whereas, a home that was considered salvageable had to adhere to strict historic guidelines. This disparity resulted in builders and investors using the demo-by-neglect method to build what they wanted. The home next door to me was stripped of windows and doors, and a hole was left open in the roof for months. The old home was definitely in bad shape after it was neglected so. The modern plans that were approved by HAHC pre-dated the purchase of the property! Therefore, the lot/house was purchased with no intention of saving one section of the original contributing home. We now have a very modern looking structure in a row of Victorian and craftsman bungalows. The good news is that our new neighbors are very nice. However, the new house looks quite out of place.</p> <p>With that being said, preservation-minded homeowners need more flexibility in restoring and repairing their own homes. There are better and more durable materials available today, which mimic wood lap siding, that we should be permitted to use. These new materials would help preserve the home for decades and would certainly not destroy the historical aesthetic of the home.</p>	<p>Note: Same as 12/18.</p> <p>Responded via email. Confirmed that the historic preservation ordinance does not regulate land use (including multifamily).</p> <p>Provided contact information for Council Member Cohen so that the writer can contact her with concerns about the private clubs, although only one private club licensed by TABC is located in the Heights historic districts. (Nine others in the 77008 zip code are located outside the HD.)</p> <p>Noted that modern architecture may be appropriate for a historic district if it is compatible in size, scale, setback, etc., and that new construction should be "of its own time."</p> <p>Clarified that damaged siding can be replaced with like siding, but just because some siding is damaged, that doesn't mean that all siding should be replaced.</p> <p>Encouraged her to contact Diana DuCroz if she needs to report a demolition by neglect situation.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>It's a tough pill to swallow when a preservation-minded person, like me, is told they would not be allowed to replace rotten, termite eaten, 100+-year-old wood siding with a cement board that would look like the original siding and last for decades when the HAHC approved a modern structure with cement board siding next door.</p> <p>Most people supported the historic designation to stop the 90-day demo period that builders were using. Supporters simply wanted as many historic homes preserved as possible. Few, if any, people wanted over-regulation and government intrusion in making repairs and improvements to their own homes.</p> <p>Another dark cloud over the original Houston Heights is the introduction of more and more bars, and bars disguised as restaurants, to a historically and legally DRY neighborhood. No residential community does well once bars are everywhere attracting people from outside the area. The private club loophole has brought bars into the dry residential area next to homes in many cases. We purchased here because we knew that the Heights was voted dry more than 100 years ago and would have to be voted wet. But the City and the TABC are now allowing bars and restaurants serving liquor, using the private club loophole. We are now deluged with intoxicated people and drivers on our streets. Many people are unaware that the original Heights boundaries are quite narrow. If you stand on Heights Blvd. and face east, you only have to walk 5 1/2 short blocks (the short side of a rectangle) to be outside the dry boundary, facing west only 8 short blocks. Any Heights resident could access booze by foot, bike, or car quite easily without a bar being built next to their home. This private club phenomenon will also destroy the original residential character of our neighborhood. The HAHC should address this issue with City Council and the TABC.</p> <p>Thanks for reading my views. I realize that you are not in a position to change everything for the better. I do appreciate your efforts, and I hope that I have made you aware of some of the issues facing our historic neighborhood.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
1/5/2016	<p>I am sorry I am just sending my answers to the questions posed on the first Houston heights preservation meeting. I was unable to attend the first meeting and it was very hectic during the holiday season.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What made you want to live in the Heights? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character of the area • Friends live in the area • Urban location • Walkability • Close to place of work • Restaurants are unique to the area, not chains 2. What makes the Heights special? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only true residential urban grid in Houston • Uniformity of building heights • Similarity of scale throughout the neighborhood • Gardens surrounding the houses. Lateral separation between houses is usually generous. • Old trees • A good balance between built and unbuilt mass • Predominance of solid (wall) over void (windows) • Front porches in a large % of homes • Homes are close enough to the street so that it allows for an interaction with the neighbors and passer byes. • Stylistic diversity 3. What would you want built next door to your house? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A house with a similar FAR lot usage • Not more than two stories high • With a front porch • With a similar setback from the street as my house • With enough lateral setbacks so that the houses are set in a garden • A house that follows the style of the area without ending being a caricature of a style 4. What would you not want built next door to your house? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A townhouse complex • No McMansions • Any other use that is not <u>single family</u> residential • A house taller than 2 stories • A house that is too close to the property line • A house that does not follow the general style of the area 	<p>Responded and thanked him for his input.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
1/12/16	<p>As homeowners, invested in our living vital neighborhood, it is with hopes that our voices count more than builders and developers {with immediate financial gain}.</p> <p>As incompatible and monstrous-in-scale additions go up – completely out-of scale from the surrounding historic homes with lovely mature trees and gardens— the livability of a once desirable neighborhood is permanently eroded.</p>	Responded via email, thanking for the comment.
1/12/16	<p>I ca not make the meetings that I received a letter about but I do want to make one comment. I have lived in the Heights for 10 years and my family for 15-20. I believe in keeping the historic district intact and having guidelines. In my opinion two things need to be addressed.</p> <p>1) Windows: New windows that fit the look of the historic Heights should be allowed. I have already rebuilt my house, but I have been a part of four rebuilds with family and friends and every one had new windows in the front of the house denied. I don't know if anyone on the committee lives in these types of houses, but there is a huge difference in energy efficiency between old windows and new ones. It is much colder or warmer in the front of my house compared to the back depending upon the weather outside due to new windows in the back of the house versus old in the front.</p> <p>2) The fact that old dilapidated houses cannot be torn down is crazy. I have three houses behind mine, and one not too far that are basically boarded up and cause many things beyond being an eyesore. The bigger problem is that homeless people started using these houses. Mice and termites have become a problem as well. There needs to be a process to get these houses approved for demolition or through an approval for re-design so the owner can sell and a new buyer has an assurance about what their options are. People won't buy these houses as there is no assurance about what they can do with the property.</p> <p>Thank you for listening.</p>	Responded via email, thanking for the comment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What made you want to live in the Heights? <p>I am a fourth-generation resident of the Houston Heights. My parents (and siblings) fled for the suburbs as they married and bought houses in the 1960s and 1970s. But my grandparents lived at [address] for some 70 years. I attended church, school and community functions with them and saw firsthand how special the Heights community was, even as the neighborhood got much crime-related bad publicity. This “small town in the big city” atmosphere, affordability for location, and the lure of</p>	Responded and thanked her for her input.

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>preserving a neglected historic home was what drew me to the Heights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes the Heights special? Historically, it has been that it was a welcoming place for people across the economic and social spectrum. When I moved to the area in 1992, it was a combination of elderly homeowners, renters (often families) and urban pioneers attracted by the in-town location and the stock of affordable and historic homes. • What would you want built next door to your house? I have had new construction built next door! I am very pleased with the house that was built next door about 10 years ago. Building a large multi-story home next door to my modest Victorian cottage could have been problematic BUT the homeowners scaled and sited the house carefully and minimized my loss of light and view. Plus that house was sympathetic to the architectural style of the surrounding homes. Not so the new construction across the street (or three doors down Arlington) which both are straight out f tract home construction in suburbs and which don't relate to the streetscape, honor neighboring properties or reflect an architectural style with any connection to the Historic District. • What would you not want built next door to your house? Any construction (residential, multi-family or commercial) that blocked all light, crowded my property by being massed up against the property line, and/or that didn't make ample provision for owner and guest parking without depending on the space in front of my house. <p>I view this process as being critical to not only what is built and preserved in the Height. How this dialogue happens and how these guidelines are developed are critical to preserving the sense of community that binds us as a unique place to live.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
1/15/16	<p>What responsibilities do property owners have in the city-designated historic district?</p> <p>Ask for permission from the HAHC before altering anything to the exterior of the property you own. Constantly educate yourself on the changes that are being made within the HAHC.</p> <p>Which parts of the Heights best represent what the Heights should look like, 10 years from now?</p> <p>Heights Boulevard, Harvard St, Cortlandt St, and Arlington St. People started moving and investing into the Heights way before the Heights Historic Districts were created. Having a minority of the original owners with a large voice speak for everyone is not what we want to represent the Heights in 10 years when most of them are gone. We would like to see a new generation move and invest into our neighborhood with pride and security. We would like to continue to see our public elementary, middle, and high schools continue to improve in hopes one day our children will attend there as well just like the original owners and their children did years ago.</p> <p>What do you want to make sure the consultants know about the Heights?</p> <p>The majority of the people buying and investing into improving our neighborhood do not want to live in a 2 bedroom 1 bathroom home. These families paying \$500k for a property that has not been maintained in ages wants to know they can remodel and add onto a 2 bedroom 1 bath home to meet the needs of their family and recoup their investment. We would like to see our property values to continue to increase and the fear of the HAHC in the last 2 years has done the opposite. We need to gain the trust and understanding of the HAHC so that buyers feel confident in their investment.</p> <p>One of the major issues is not allowing home owners to build over the existing structure. A lot of the properties in the Heights are 50' wide by 100' deep. On this size lot, it is impossible to add onto the rear of an existing home to</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>create a modest 3 bedroom 2 bath space without completely eliminating the entire backyard. This has created a look known as camel back and is not appealing to home owners or neighbors in the community. It limits design, eliminates backyard space, promotes building closer to lot lines, increases the number of trees being removed, increases impervious coverage causing drainage issues, and reduces appeal and resale value.</p> <p>What are the benefits of living in a city-designated historic district?</p> <p>To maintain the architectural features of the existing homes.</p> <p>Maintaining the look of the original homes from the street.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
1/19/16	<p>You handled the disgruntled neighbors that attended firmly and professionally last week and I applaud you for conducting a well-organized meeting.</p> <p>I would like to have your advice on the "context" for my street, the 1000 block of Oxford. (1023 Oxford). There is a commercial property on the east side at 11th, but only residences on the west side and myst 2 on the east. How is the context determined, who decides the context, can the context be changed and will these multiple neighborhood contexts be online so one may watch if changes are being made?</p> <p>Thanks again, and I appreciate your reply at your convenience.</p>	<p>Responded with information about context areas, noting that the consulting team will help answer his question.</p>
1/19/16	<p>Thank you for doing such a great job leading that meeting! I mentioned to Margaret afterwards how well you handled the questions/complaints that were raised. I wanted to see firsthand how the design guidelines process works, so it was a very informative meeting for me.</p>	
1/19/16	<p>Good afternoon. We met at the meeting last week at St. Andrew's. I just wanted to follow up on lighting issues/guidelines. I live on Heights Blvd. in a two-story house built in 1900. I love my house, and as is true of many areas of the Blvd., I am socked in between commercial buildings. One building next door was formerly the site of a house that burned down. It is a double lot, and they built a large commercial building on one side and covered the rest of the lot with a huge concrete parking lot. There are three very large sodium lights on big poles right next to my house and property. I had some back-and-forth with the owners and they relented to put some directionality to it, but I still get a lot of light pollution in my yard and house. The building behind me has also put in very bright lights (it is a restored commercial property – I like what they did and I like having the businesses there, but the lights are awfully bright), and now the lovely building next to me (a lovely old house on the register of historic places, [now] turned into small offices) has done the same. I am all for security, but I know it is possible to direct the light more. I really should not have to buy blackout curtains just to be able to sleep. The lighting should be directed more towards the building/parking area they want to protect, if they are so concerned. I don't need my backyard lit so much that I don't require any lighting at all at night to be able to see to walk to and from my garage. So, I would say that the design guidelines should say something about lighting or the lighting plan. That is my big complaint.</p> <p>I have lived in my house since 2008 or so, and I have been</p>	<p>Worked with Planning to put her in touch with Code Enforcement to address these issues.</p>

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>through the approvals process when I needed to repair the siding after damage from a fire next door and to make a garage out of the old carriage house in my backyard. My contractor did most of the leg work, and I was impressed by how thorough the process was – someone even came out to the house to inspect and gave my contractor a bit of a hard time on a few details. But I am one of those people who feel that a historic district without teeth in the ordinance is no historic district at all, and I love living where I do. So, all in all, it felt like the process was fair, the questions were appropriate and the suggestions/recommendations sound.</p> <p>I would also say the guidelines should include porches – one of the things that is so lovely about the Heights is the deep porches. I see a lot of new construction with porchlets. They really aren't deep enough to realistically use them to sit on, and I think having porches you can actually sit on and use helps to promote people using them and interacting with their neighbors as they go by. I may be biased, as my front porch is one of my favorite features about my house – I love to sit and drink my coffee and watch folks going up and down the sidewalk or the esplanade.</p> <p>Retaining trees when at all possible I think is also important – that is one of the best things about an old neighborhood – all the large mature trees.</p> <p>Thank you for listening the other night. I look forward to the next meeting and will think more about this issues/questions you raised.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
1/23/16	<p>What made you want to live in the Heights?</p> <p>Community feel, diversity of population, diversity of housing (\$\$ to \$\$\$) that maintains a connection to the historic aesthetic. One- and two-story houses with a little breathing space in between them, rather than the four-story ones you see in Rice Military (for example) with virtually no separation between one to the next. Proximity to good non-chain or limited-chain restaurants and coffee shops, etc., trees and green spaces and hike/bike trails, location inside the loop close to downtown and Post Oak business districts.</p> <p>What makes the Heights special? [no answer]</p> <p>What would you want built next door to your house?</p> <p>Single-family residential that maintains the Heights' historic look and feel. Does not have to exactly replicate the building it replaces, as long as it preserves the aesthetic. Something that continues to increase property values and the desirability of living in the neighborhood, as we've experienced with the gentrification of the last several years.</p> <p>What would you not want built next door to your house?</p> <p>Retail, a high traffic/high parking property such as a school or church/temple, high-density residential such as an apartment building or condo, something that's too noisy, a business or residential tower, something that does not maintain an appropriate connection to the Heights' historic aesthetic, or something that removes all trees and vegetation.</p>	
1/30/16	<p>What made you want to live in the Heights?</p> <p>We love the small-town community feel with LOCAL businesses (not franchises) within walking or biking distance. We also love the unique character of the homes with their colorful and historic designs.</p> <p>What makes the Heights special?</p> <p>The feeling of community, closeness with your neighbors, the diversity or demographic and political backgrounds, the appreciation for art and culture, the fairly open-minded and (in some ways) more liberal or tolerant views.</p> <p>The unique period look from the 1900-1920s.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>What would you want built next door to your house?</p> <p>A traditional Heights style home that is of the SCALE and style (bungalow, Victorian, etc.) of the 1900-1920s. NOT New Orleans style, not modern, not zero lot line, not monstrosities that dwarf the bungalow beside it. Residences should be single [family] propert[ies] that are the traditional lot size of the section of the Heights (e.g., 6600 square feet in Houston Heights, 5000 square feet in Norhill, etc.) Home heights should be capped to the height of what was normal for the period.</p> <p>What would you not want built next door to your house?</p> <p>No condos or no apartments. We should maintain single-family residences, with the exception of the duplex, four-plex, and eight-plex apartments as they already exist.</p> <p>We should not need to construct any NEW buildings for retail services, either. Existing spaces should be renovated to accommodate new retail. (For example, Eight Flint Row is a nice renovation of existing retail; MedSpring replaced a single family residence and was not necessary.)</p> <p>I hope that we do not allow new building of retail space on Heights any longer, such that the look of Heights Blvd. becomes as unattractive as Yale.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
2/5/16	<p>My husband and I attended the community meeting on 12/8/2015 and were quite impressed with how you handled the meeting and the approach that you and your team are taking toward the guidelines project.</p> <p>We missed the January meeting, but I was very pleased to find the reports on both of the meetings on the project website. I enjoyed reading some of the comments that residents made in answer to the questions that were posed. I agree with many, disagree with only a few, and definitely laughed out loud a few times! I am glad people are keeping a good sense of humor in the process.</p> <p>I noted that based on the conclusions drawn from the feedback provided in the first meeting, a survey will be being sent out to the community in March. I realize that this survey may already be completed, but I wondered if there was any value to submit a few comments from my husband and myself to questions asked in that first meeting. Most of our comments were very similar to those made by others and are already captured in your summary. A few were not, however, so I thought it might still be useful to submit them (though quite belatedly).</p> <p>Question 1. What made you want to live in the Heights?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (our comments were all captured) <p>Question 2. What makes the Heights special?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale and proportions of buildings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overall geometry ○ Fenestration ○ Materials • Consistent 20-25' front setbacks • Diversity of culture and income among the neighborhood residents • 1000-2000 square foot homes • "Mom and Pop" shops • 5-10' side setbacks • (our other comments were all captured) <p>Question 3. What would you want built next door to YOUR house?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (our comments were all captured) 	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>Question 4. What would you NOT want to have built next door to your house?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >2000 square foot home • Opaque fences in front yards <p>I've lived in the Heights since 1993 and bought my house on [this street] in 1996. The neighborhood was already gentrifying by that time, but it has changed a great deal since. While change many times is good, sometimes it saddens. One of my biggest concerns about the redevelopment of the Heights is that it seems very nearly impossible for single people or young couples (read "normal" income, not wealthy) to purchase homes in the neighborhood. I would like to see small bungalows valued as homes in the scale that they are, rather than simply as starting points that developers purchase to convert into multi-story lot-fillers. I know that design guidelines should have no direct influence or effect on the heated real estate prices in the neighborhood, but I do feel that if preservation is strengthened, we are more likely to respect and preserve these smaller homes that fill a niche in our community fabric.</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
2/9/16	<p>A quick review of the last 125 years' history of the Houston Heights will help put the comments and notes that follow into perspective.</p> <p>1. 1890's – 1920's</p> <p>The Omaha and South Texas Land Company platted and promoted the Houston Heights as an independent family community, accessible to the shops and businesses of downtown Houston, but not part of it. The Heights had its own shops, schools, churches, and businesses, but its main selling point were the large lots for single family homes, and its independent city government which could pass laws which the larger community might not be ready for. Prohibition was the principal one of these. The developers enjoyed some success, and by the 1920's a vibrant little township had developed. Almost all the local houses that were later enrolled in the National Register of Historic Buildings date from this period, and it is their survival which has contributed most to the historic feel of the Heights. Without them, the question of a historic district would never have arisen.</p> <p>2. 1930's - 1950's</p> <p>Once the Heights was incorporated in Houston in 1917, and Prohibition became the law of the land a few years later, the Heights lost much of what had made it distinctive, and entered into a new phase of its history. Houston has many fine family houses built in the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's, but it is remarkable how few there are in the Heights, compared to Garden Oaks, River Oaks, Southampton, South Wayside, and even the eastern side of Studewood. For whatever reason, no-one in these decades wanted to build a house for their family in the Heights.</p> <p>As a real estate project, the Heights was a partial failure by 1930. Over half the lots were still undeveloped, no new middle-class family houses were being started, and some of those that had been built a generation earlier were being converted to other uses. An example of this is 122 E. 5th Street, a large house on the corner of Harvard and 5th Street, which was built by the Roffall family in 1906-7. They were still living in it in the 1920 census, but by 1930 it had been subdivided into apartments, and a separate four-plex had been built in its back yard. A total of seven rental units survived until the 1980's.</p> <p>These conditions were ripe for the construction of large numbers of unpretentious rent houses. By the 1950's the majority of the housing stock in the Heights was of this kind, as was true of many other neighborhoods on the North and East sides of Houston built</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>in these decades. They were single story, wooden pier-and beam houses, with one or two bedrooms, often under 1,000 square feet. Unlike the earlier generation of houses in the Heights, they were conspicuous for the simplicity of their design, and the low quality of materials in their construction. The main design criterion was cost – they were cheap to build and cheap to rent. (photo of 114 & 122 East 5th Street)</p> <p>3. 1960's - 1980's</p> <p>Since the Heights had become primarily a blue-collar community living in low-cost rent houses, it was not surprising to see apartment complexes start to appear in the prosperous post-war decades. These represented an improvement over the standard wooden rent houses, and were well received. Most blocks in the Heights acquired an apartment complex or two between 1960 and 1980, and some very grand ones were built on Heights Boulevard and certain other streets.</p> <p>It was in the 1970's and 1980's that the seeds were planted for the later gentrification of the Heights. A few pioneers started to restore the fine old houses of the 1890-1930 era, and a local initiative succeeded in enrolling nearly 100 of them on the National Register. The Heights Association was formed, not initially as the real estate lobby it was to become, but to diffuse the bad publicity the Heights had received as the home of the Candyman mass murderer. However, the Heights in 1990 still looked far more like the Heights of 25 years earlier (1965) than that of 25 years later (2015).</p> <p>4. 1990's – 2010's</p> <p>Starting in the mid-1990's, there has been surge in new construction and renovation in the Heights, reflecting a renewed interest in living closer to the city center. Prosperous professional families who in previous decades settled in the suburbs, now like the older inner-city neighborhoods like the Heights. There are a number of these in Houston, all inside the Loop, and each one has its individual look and feel. The historic ambience seems to have survived better in the Heights than in some of the others, and is what attracts most of the people who live here. As a result, the renovation of the housing stock that began around 1995 respected and strengthened that aspect which had drawn people here in the first place.</p> <p>The newcomers prefer larger houses of which there were not many in the Heights. Before the advent of the historic districts,</p>	

DATE	COMMENT	RESPONSE
	<p>this upgrading of the housing stock typically saw the removal of the humble rent houses, and the construction of two-story houses in their place. The new construction has been almost exclusively in traditional styles, Queen Ann, New Orleans, Craftsman, Second Empire, and many blocks have seen their historic ambience greatly enhanced by the replacement of 60-year old rent houses with these contemporary versions of traditional styles, which in many cases are unique to the Heights. In recent years, a majority of Heights voters have opted to incorporate themselves in Historic Districts, with the intention of further protecting and enhancing the traditional look and feel of the neighborhood. Some of the results have been good, but others have been counter-productive. The blanket protection of mid-century rent houses has had the curious effect of halting the construction of new houses in recognizable historical styles, and their replacement with a hybrid style that is neither historic nor elegant. This is the “camel-back” or “turducken” style, where a two-story house is built behind a single-story “shack”. It is almost impossible to build an attractive and elegant house when the main design criterion is that it should hide behind a non-descript rent house and attempt to be invisible.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A. THE PROBLEM WE HAVE TO SOLVE TO MAKE THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS WORK</p> <p>The main problem is that the quality of housing built 1995-2005 before we became Historic Districts is far superior to the quality that has been built since. The contribution of the many houses built in these ten or a dozen years to the pleasure we feel living and circulating in the Heights is second only to the contribution of the grand old ladies from the 1890-1930 era. The mid-century rent houses and apartment complexes contribute almost nothing, and neither do the turduckens of the historic district era. Since 2010, the best examples of inspiring, traditional architecture in the Heights are to be found outside the historic districts (for example between Yale and Shepherd, south of 11th Street)</p> <p>1. Examples from the Golden Age of Heights Redevelopment (1995-2005)</p> <p><i>(photo of 310-24 E. 5th Street)</i> (several small rent houses were removed to make way for these elegant houses)</p> <p><i>(photo of 420 Harvard)</i> (Unfortunately built on the site of the 1910 Heights Telephone Exchange, a National Register building, which was demolished)</p>	

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	<p><i>(photo of 512-6 Arlington)</i> (several small rent houses were removed to make room for these imposing houses)</p> <p><i>(photo of 647 Arlington)</i> (a Heights gem - replaced an undistinguished rent house)</p> <p><i>(photo of 640 Cortlandt)</i> (replaced a rent house)</p> <p><i>(photo of 647 Cortlandt)</i> (replaced a rent house)</p> <p><i>(photo of 702 Cortlandt)</i></p> <p>1. Examples of the Hybrid “Turducken” Style of the Historic District era (2010-15)</p> <p><i>(photo of 511 Cortlandt)</i> Unfortunately the original house had little charm of its own, and the extension behind did it no favors.</p> <p><i>(photo of 302 East 5th Street)</i> Fortunately the lot was big enough to allow the original house at the front and the extension at the back to coexist without crowding each other out.</p> <p><i>(photo of 614 Arlington)</i> A fancy porch for an otherwise undistinguished house</p> <p><i>(photo of 643 Arlington)</i> The charm of the original house at the front is overshadowed by the ugliness behind it.</p> <p><i>(photo of 645 Harvard)</i> Like 302 East 5th Street, the lot was fortunately big enough to allow the original house at the front and the extension at the back to coexist.</p> <p><i>(photo of 515 Arlington)</i> A lost opportunity to build something as elegant as the houses on the other side of the road (see 512-6 Arlington above).</p> <p><i>(photo of 511 Arlington)</i> Little was gained by keeping the original rent house at the front. An opportunity to build an elegant house was lost.</p>	

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	<p><i>(photo of 525 Harvard)</i> Another marginally attractive cottage at the front with an eyesore behind it.</p> <p><i>(photo of 535 Harvard)</i> There is little charm in the original rent house, and none in the extension behind it.</p> <p><i>(photo of 613 Arlington)</i> There is little to recommend the original rent house, and nothing to be said for the new extension.</p> <p><i>(photo of 409 Harvard)</i> This is saved by the charm of the original house in front. The garage at the back and the windows over it are acceptable, but the smaller extension in front of them has neither architectural nor historical merit.</p> <p><i>(photo of 515 Harvard)</i> This is the only completely successful example I know, because (a) the original house had some charm of its own, (b) the developer greatly enhanced that charm, (c) the extension at the rear is totally invisible from the street.</p> <p><i>(photo of 621 Arlington)</i> This one looks like it stepped out of a children’s cartoon.</p> <p>B. Suggestions</p> <p>The main problem with new construction in the historic district era is that the rent houses we have to keep in our front yards are not that interesting. The solution outside the historic district is obvious – remove them first and start again. If this is not permissible in the historic district, we have to find a way to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Allow them to be made more interesting (see 515 Harvard above), even if the original rent house looked different. (b) Allow them to be moved to the back of the lot so something interesting can be built facing the street. <p>Define a context where they are non-contributing so they can be removed. The intersection of Cortlandt and East 7th Street, which is bisected by the hike and bike trail, is a possible test case. On three of the corners there are beautiful houses in traditional styles that were built around 2000 (640, 647 and 702 Cortlandt shown above), and the fourth corner has an undistinguished rent house (or former rent house) at 703 Cortlandt (photo). It is clearly</p>	

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	not contributing to the context of the intersection in the way that the other three are. Is there a turducken in its future? In due course when the owner needs a larger house, it would be best to allow it to be removed, and to unify this intersection with a fourth grand house.	

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2/16/16	<p>I just learned that you are shepherding though design guidelines relative to the Heights Historical Districts. That sounds like a monumental undertaking and I wanted to wish you luck in accomplishing the task.</p> <p>I am a resident in the Heights East Historical District, and wanted to provide my input to the four questions posed at the January 2016 meeting. I hopefully will be able to attend future meetings.</p> <p><u>Which parts of the Heights today represent what the Heights should look like 10 years from now?</u></p> <p>Harvard between White Oak and 20th streets and Cortlandt between 8th and 14th streets are representative of what the Heights should look like in 10 years. I am referencing the fact that those streets are tree lined with curbs and gutters and many updated houses and otherwise well maintained homes. As well as numerous other types of buildings, from schools, churches, multi-family apartments, etc.</p> <p><u>What do you want to make sure the consultants know about the Heights?</u></p> <p>I want to make sure that the consultants know that the Heights is a living, breathing community, filled with residents in all stages of life. There are singles, young couples, young (growing) families, mature families, and empty nesters. The residents of the Heights needs change as their life circumstances change. This means that design guidelines cannot be so restrictive or conservative that residents are prohibited from meeting those changing needs by modifying their housing and homes. I want to make sure the consultants recognize that the Heights is not a museum filled with toy houses stuck in time and place but a dynamic real community.</p> <p><u>What are the benefits of living in a city-designated historic district?</u></p> <p>While it is true that living in a city-designated historic district keeps the character of a neighborhood's buildings from suddenly changing, I see very few benefits from living in a historic district. Ordinances restricting owners' property rights dampen the value of homes that are not fully updated and which are smaller than considered normal in modern society. It also artificially boosts the value of those homes that are already updated with modern conveniences and size, which restricts access to the neighborhood to the rich. Indeed, that phenomena</p>	

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	<p>is ironic as the neighborhood, as originally conceived, was to be a home for a wide range of people and housed Houston’s working class, its middle class, as well as its upper class – the historic district designation is unfortunately contributing to the loss of that kind of melting pot of people and puts an improper emphasis on buildings over people.</p> <p><u>What responsibilities do property owners have in a city-designated historic district?</u></p> <p>Property owners in a city-designated historic district should maintain the character of the neighborhood, by properly maintaining their property from disrepair. They should also, when remodeling or revising their property, seek to maintain the types of homes traditionally built in the neighborhood. For example, if one buys a single family home and wants to change it, that person could reasonably be limited to building a new single family home, as opposed to constructing apartment buildings or townhouses. The home owner, in my opinion, could be reasonably required to maintaining proper set-backs to maintain uniformity in placement of a home’s façade. Property owners should have no responsibility, however, to maintain subjective elements of a building such as a building’s style.</p> <p>Property owners also have the responsibility, regardless of whether they want to change the structure, to properly maintain the property.</p> <p>I hope these answers are helpful to you and your team. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.</p>	