

Historic Preservation Program



Objectives

The objectives of the audit were to determine whether the historic preservation program is achieving its objectives and how the process compares with similar entities.

Background

The overall goal of the City of Austin's historic preservation program is to protect and enhance neighborhoods, buildings, and sites that reflect elements of Austin's cultural, social, political, and architectural history.

The Historic Preservation Office within Planning and Zoning Department is responsible for administering historic preservation program and works with the City's Historic Landmark Commission (HLC).

The Historic Preservation Office's (HPO) records indicate that currently the City has over 600 local historic landmarks and three local historic districts.

What We Found

Overall, we found several issues that indicate that the Planning and Zoning Department is not effectively managing the historic preservation program, which may prevent the program from achieving its objectives.

Issues noted in the administration of the historic preservation program

Application Fees	Application Review	Property Preservation	HLC Approval of Applications
<p>Finding 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fees are not collected consistently Fees collected are not secured 	<p>Finding 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Justifications for administrative approvals are not documented Application Status is not consistently tracked 	<p>Finding 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only a subset of properties are inspected Inspections are not consistently documented No formal guidance on inspection rating criteria 	<p>Finding 4</p> <p>Commission members indicated that they do not have timely and adequate information to make informed decisions</p>

SOURCE: OCA analysis of the City's historic preservation program activities, October 2016

We compared the City of Austin's historic preservation activities with those of 21 other entities and found general similarities. However, we found that Austin differs from the majority of other entities in the following areas:

- commission/board member qualification requirements;
- legal guidance during commission/board meetings; and
- the timeframe in which meeting agenda back-up information is provided to commission/board members.

What We Recommend

The Director of Planning and Zoning department should;

- improve the current process for collection of fees;
- develop and implement a process to document justification for administrative approval;
- improve the existing process for inspecting the historic designated properties
- work with historic landmark commission to identify needs for training, back-up information and legal support.