



Recommendations for Historic Preservation to be included in the City of Austin, Land Development Code Revision

Introduction

The mission of Preservation Austin (formerly the Heritage Society of Austin) is to promote Austin's diverse cultural heritage through the preservation of historic places. We strive to place preservation at the forefront of the public policy agenda, enabling our community to have an active role in ensuring that Austin's unique past is part of our shared future. In order to achieve this vision, we focus our efforts on education, alliances and advocacy. Preservation Austin takes positions on preservation issues with the advisement of volunteer committees that consist of professionals in the fields of historic preservation, architecture, planning, development, neighborhood advocacy and others who have a vested interest in helping Austin maintain a strong cultural identity through historic preservation.

Preservation Austin believes that by protecting Austin's historic fabric, we protect our city's identity and help promote a strong sense of place for both tourists and residents. As the City of Austin grows exponentially, attention to historic preservation is crucial. We understand that the Land Development Code (LDC) revisions provide an opportunity to embrace the Imagine Austin Plan that stipulates protection of historic resources even as our city makes way for greater density and new development. Toward that end, we recognize that with Code revisions we can help facilitate Local Historic Districts initiated by residents, which serve to protect neighborhood character, and that improvements in inspections and permitting processes can be implemented so property owners are incentivized to preserve historic structures.

We welcome the opportunity to be stakeholders in the Land Development Code revision process and to assist in ongoing efforts to shape Austin as a world class city, allowing for growth while maintaining the resources that make our city unique. We therefore offer the following suggestions that we hope will be adopted in the revised Land Development Code.

Preservation Austin Recommendations for the LDC

- 1. A Historic Resources Survey of properties over 30 years old is updated every 20 years and the Preservation Plan is updated every 10 years.**
 - An updated Historic Resources Survey and Preservation Plan are essential to the successful implementation of the LDC and should include properties 30 years old and older.
- 2. LDC enhances and sustains areas with significant historic character, particularly those already recognized as Historic Districts, such as the following:**
 - Downtown Austin
 - The protections for historic resources in the approved Downtown Austin Plan should be implemented in the LDC.
 - All existing National Register Historic Districts, with special consideration to those along primary urban corridors including:

- Congress Avenue,
 - East 6th Street,
 - West Line District (W. 6th Street).
- Existing Local Historic Districts, which include:
 - Harthan Street,
 - Hyde Park,
 - Castle Hill.
 - Central residential neighborhoods that have intense development pressure and high concentrations of historic fabric with a diversity of housing stock, including but not limited to:
 - East Austin,
 - North-central Austin (with mid-century structures),
 - Old West Austin,
 - South Austin along South Congress, S. 1st and S. Lamar,
 - Central neighborhoods near UT, along Guadalupe St., and 15th Street (Judge's Hill).
 - Portions of the Capitol Complex which are not state-owned and can benefit from City Planning, within the area from 15th to MLK, Trinity to San Antonio & 11th to 15th, Trinity to San Jacinto, currently characterized by:
 - Inefficient and underutilized multi story and surface parking garages,
 - Concentrations of single use development, (predominately city and state offices),
 - Little to no retail,
 - Little to no residential,
 - Poor pedestrian design,
 - Large parcel size that attract REIT development and undermine city fabric,
 - A small number of significant, yet threatened, historic resources.

3. Historic Preservation is better integrated in the City planning and development process.

- City Planners honor the concerns of residents regarding protection of neighborhood character, and implement tools of historic preservation and proposed new construction standards as addressed in existing neighborhood plans and Local Historic Districts.
- As proposed in the Imagine Austin Plan, City Planning identifies and then protects areas with high concentrations of historic fabric by adopting context-based design standards for new construction adjacent to those areas, working in tandem with emerging development plans i.e., TODs, Transit Corridors, Village Centers, Activity Centers, Neighborhood Plans, existing Historic Districts, etc.
- Protection of historic assets, particularly in central neighborhoods, is taken into consideration while planning for effective transportation corridors and multi-modal transport.

4. Demolition and zoning codes are upheld, consistent, and transparent.

- Demolition of contributing structures significant to neighborhood or district character are discouraged and dis-incentivized.

- Owners and developers are deterred from making code infractions by significant economic or entitlement consequences.
- All structures over 50 years will continue to have permits approved by HLC before they are demolished or moved to prevent demolition/relocation permits from being granted without knowledge of the historic preservation department.
- Demolishing structures without a permit results in real consequences such as requiring the developer to cease construction and resubmit their building permit for re-approval with the City, and possible suspension of the contractor's license.

5. Incentives are provided to encourage rehabilitation of historic resources.

- Incentives could include density bonus programs for historic preservation, transfer of development rights, tax exemptions/abatements, grant and/or loan programs.
- Designated funding for grants and loans can come from hotel/motel taxes, in lieu of fees as part of a density bonus program, the Business Retention and Enhancement Program, and right-of-way permitting fees.

6. City Code and Inspections are specific to either new construction or historic structures so as not to compromise historic integrity.

- Technical and energy codes are adopted that are not counter-productive to the maintenance of historic character.
- Local amendments to the International Building Code (IBC) and International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) are adopted that require conformance with code unless such conformance would adversely impact the architectural character of a property that is locally landmarked, eligible for local landmark status or is contributing or potentially contributing to a historic district, as determined by the Historic Preservation Officer. For example, currently the IECC states that historically designated structures, and those eligible for designation, are exempt from all provisions of that code.
- Technical and energy codes are compatible with other codes, provide sustainability opportunities, and are performance based rather than prescriptive.
- Adopt separate sub code guidelines for existing structures. As an example, refer to the NJ Rehab Sub Code Guidelines:
www.preservationnj.org/site/ExpEng/images/images/pdfs/Rehab%20Subcode.PDF
- Inspectors with different expertise are assigned for new versus existing construction.
- Designate a City contact who acts as a liaison or case worker between developer and building inspector to communicate existing and historic structures building guidelines.

7. A periodic review or reevaluation of the Historic Preservation related sections of the LDC is codified to

confirm their efficacy in protecting historic resources.

Suggested Operational Needs to Implement Code Revision Suggestions

- 1. Ensure that the Historic Landmark Commission (HLC) continues to exist as a separate commission, comprised of members with specialized expertise, to knowledgeably implement our Historic Preservation Ordinance, with a representative appointed to any joint subcommittees established to include members of the Planning Commission and Zoning and Platting Commission.**
- 2. The City provides adequate staffing for historic preservation planners, including (at minimum) the following most essential staff positions:**
 - **Preservation Officer**, a person with the leadership and master planning ability to articulate a vision for the HPO, professionally guide the Historic Landmark Commission, and lead staff in carrying out that vision.
 - **Deputy Preservation Officer**, a person with skills in working with the public, City Commissions and staff to accomplish the HPO's goals, and to review historic zoning and certificate of appropriateness applications.
 - **Architectural Historian/Researcher**, a person that assures historic preservation cases are adequately prepared for Commissions and Council.
 - **Inspector**, an architect, architectural historian or qualified person to inspect historically zoned properties and districts to ensure they meet the Secretary of Interior Standards and the requirements for tax abatements where applicable.
 - **Administrative Assistant**, to handle communications, maintain records and assist staff members.
- 3. The City provides adequate staffing levels, training and accountability for development review and code enforcement staff.**
- 4. The City funds annual National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC)- approved training for Commissioners & Staff.**
- 5. The Historic Landmark Commission forms a subcommittee to address the CodeNext project, and future LDC issues.**

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