

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

This set of historic district design guidelines have been developed for Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South. They illustrate how the City of Houston's historic preservation ordinance (as amended in Fall 2015) applies to resources in these three historic districts.

Property owners and their design professionals (architects, builders, etc.) should consult these design guidelines when planning a project that involves a change to the exterior of a building or construction of a new building within these historic districts. The City's Historic Preservation staff in the Planning and Development Department and the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) will also use these design guidelines to determine whether to approve an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA), for a project that proposes to make changes to a building in these historic districts.

When all of the people who are involved in the COA process — property owners, design professionals, Planning staff, and members of the HAHC — are using the same reference material as provided in these design guidelines, the results should be more consistent and predictable.

This section explains the City of Houston's historic district rules, why design guidelines are needed, who should use design guidelines, how this design guidelines document is organized, and how to use it most effectively.

IN THIS SECTION	
Background	1-1
Houston's Historic Districts	1-2
Criteria for Evaluating COA Applications.....	1-4
How do design guidelines help?	1-5
How were the design guidelines developed?.....	1-6
How are the design guidelines organized?	1-7
Format of the design guidelines	1-9
Who should use these design guidelines?	1-10
Contact staff for assistance	1-10

NOTE:

These design guidelines can be downloaded as PDF files from the City of Houston Historic Preservation website at: http://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/hist_pres.html.



Design guidelines provide useful information about maintaining historic properties.

Houston’s Historic Districts

The City designates historic districts, and manages changes to properties within those districts, through its historic preservation ordinance. This ordinance is a local law that establishes the City’s authority and responsibilities regarding historic landmarks and districts. It also establishes the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC), a group of knowledgeable citizens and qualified professionals who are appointed by City Council to interpret and administer the historic preservation ordinance.

The ordinance requires property owners to get approval from the City before making certain changes to buildings in a historic district. Some changes, like ordinary maintenance and repair, are exempt from this requirement, while other changes can be *administratively approved* (by Planning and Development Department staff). However, the City does regulate alterations to the exterior of a building in a historic district, additions to those buildings, new infill construction within a historic district, relocation of a building into or out of a historic district, and demolition of a building in a historic district.

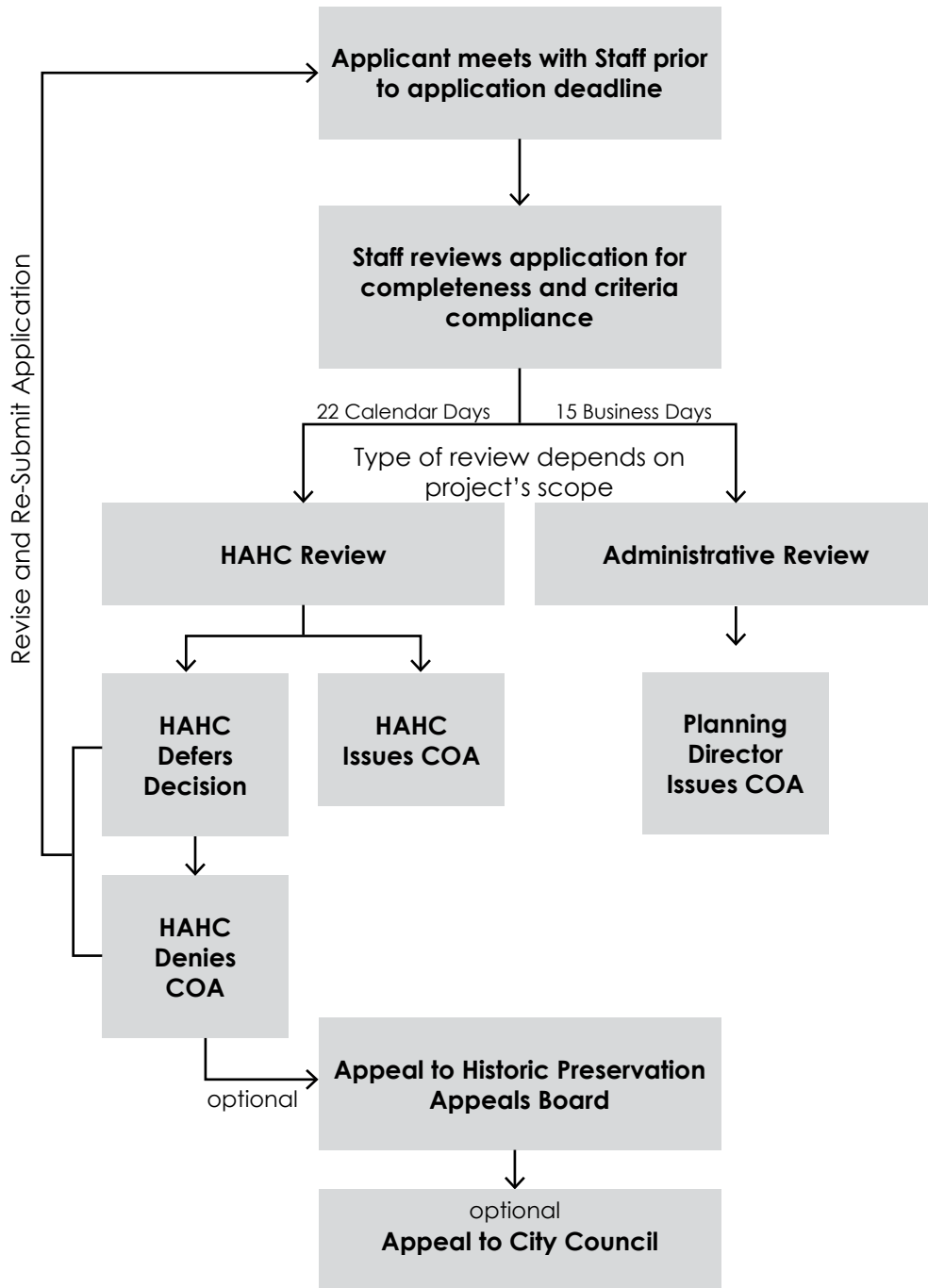
To get the City’s approval to make any of these changes, a property owner must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). The Planning staff in the Historic Preservation Office can help property owners with their application, which is processed through that office. **A property owner must obtain a COA before beginning any work that is regulated under the historic preservation ordinance.**

Each month, the HAHC considers and makes decisions about COA applications at a public hearing. The Historic Preservation staff base their recommendations, and the HAHC members base their decisions, on the criteria for evaluating COA applications as listed in the ordinance.



All property owners who plan work in the historic districts should review the design guidelines at the outset of planning a project.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS (COA) APPROVAL PROCESS



Criteria for Evaluating COA Applications

The historic preservation ordinance contains several sets of criteria for evaluating applications for Certificates of Appropriateness. The criteria to be used depend on the type of work that is involved in the proposed project, whether that is an exterior alteration, addition to an existing building or structure, new construction, relocation, or demolition.

As of the most recent amendments to the ordinance, in Fall 2015, the criteria for evaluating proposed alterations to designated historic properties include:

1. The proposed activity must retain and preserve the historical character of the property;
2. The proposed activity must contribute to the continued availability of the property for a contemporary use;
3. The proposed activity must recognize the building, structure, object or site as a product of its own time and avoid alterations that seek to create an earlier or later appearance;
4. The proposed activity must preserve the distinguishing qualities or character of the building, structure, object, or site and its environment;
5. The proposed activity must maintain or replicate distinctive stylistic exterior features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterize the building, structure, object or site;
6. New materials to be used for any exterior feature excluding what is visible from public alleys must be visually compatible with, but not necessarily the same as, the materials being replaced in form, design, texture, dimension, and scale;
7. The proposed replacement of exterior features, if any, should be based on accurate duplication of features, substantiated by available historical, physical, or pictorial evidence, where that evidence is available, rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures;
8. Proposed additions or alterations must be done in a manner that, if removed in the future, would leave unimpaired the essential form and integrity of the building, structure, object, or site;
9. The proposed design for any exterior alteration or addition must not destroy significant historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural material, including but not limited to siding, windows, doors, and porch elements;
10. The proposed alteration or addition must be compatible with the massing, size, scale, material, and character of the property and the context area; and
11. The distance from the property line to the front and side walls, porches, and exterior features of any proposed addition or alteration must be compatible with the distance to the property line of similar elements of existing contributing structures in the context area.

How do design guidelines help?

Design guidelines are used in communities all over the United States. They are a useful reference, but after City Council adopts design guidelines, they also become requirements which must be followed. Like the historic preservation ordinance, design guidelines do not require property owners to make changes to their buildings, but they do regulate what changes can be made, and how, in order to preserve the overall character of a historic district.

Because the City contains many historic districts, which can be very different from one another, the historic preservation ordinance must be written broadly enough to apply to all of them. That broad language must then be interpreted by property owners, their design professionals, the Historic Preservation staff, and the HAHC as they prepare and consider COA applications.

To make the COA process easier, and to help guide property owners in planning projects that are likely to be approved, the City has developed these design guidelines, which illustrate how to apply the ordinance criteria for the three historic districts located in the former City of Houston Heights: Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South.

Some of the guidelines in this document are *prescriptive*; in other words, they include a measurable requirement that must be met in order to obtain a COA. Other guidelines are *qualitative*, which means that they are not measurable and have to be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the circumstances of a particular property and the work that is being proposed. Because each property is unique, each COA application is considered on its own merits, which often requires both prescriptive and qualitative guidelines.

The relative importance of particular guidelines will depend on the nature of the proposed project. In most cases, individual design elements may be appropriate, but the interaction of different design elements also must be considered. A project that might be appropriate for one property might not be appropriate for another. Although this requires interpretation, these design guidelines should help by providing structure and consistent reference points for that process.

Design guidelines also include useful information that is not regulatory, such as the history of the historic district and what kind of buildings can be found there (see Section 3: About the Historic Districts), and what other resources are available to property owners to help them plan projects (see Section 9: Additional Resources).





How were the design guidelines developed?

This project began in September 2015, when the City of Houston adopted amendments to its historic preservation ordinance. Since 2010, all new historic districts have been required to have design guidelines. In 2015, the ordinance was amended to allow the creation of design guidelines for existing historic districts (established before 2010).

Another 2015 amendment required design guidelines to be developed for the three Houston Heights historic districts. Property owners and building professionals in those historic districts had requested design guidelines that would make the COA process more predictable.



The City hired consultants — Winter & Company, from Boulder, Colorado — to develop the design guidelines. The consultants conducted extensive research and data analysis to learn as much as possible about the historic districts and what property owners in those districts hoped to achieve. They analyzed data from the City's Geographic Information System (GIS), historic maps, and other existing documentation, and combined that with their own observations from several site visits during the project. In addition, the Planning staff and the consultants met with people in the community on numerous occasions to gather their input and feedback as the project went along. At workshops, community members discussed issues and challenges, their priorities, and types of development that would be compatible in their district. Many people also expressed their opinions through a Compatible Design Survey that was mailed to every property owner.

Finally, these design guidelines include and promote best practices in historic preservation that have developed in communities over the past 50 years. Design guidelines have been in use throughout the United States for decades, and this set takes advantage of the lessons learned and standards of practice that have become established during that time. This knowledge provides a foundation for developing workable solutions that allow historic districts to evolve while still preserving and enhancing their unique character.

How are the design guidelines organized?

This set of design guidelines are made up of nine sections. Each section is available as a separate PDF file so that you can select only those sections that you need for your particular project. For example, if you would like to make a change to an existing building, you would not need the section for new construction, which means an entirely new building.



Section 1: Introduction

This is the section you are currently reading.

Section 2: Preservation Fundamentals

This section explains the broad goals of historic preservation, as well as how the City of Houston works to achieve those goals through its policies. This section also explains key terms and concepts, and it lists the steps to follow when you are planning a project. Everyone should read the material in this section.

Section 3: About the Historic Districts

This section explains how the City of Houston Heights developed. It describes the most common styles of architecture found in the three Houston Heights historic districts, and the key character-defining features of each architectural style. This section also contains other information that is specific to these districts.

Section 4: Exterior Alterations to Contributing Structures

This section includes guidelines for making alterations to the exterior of buildings, structures, objects, or sites within the historic district, as defined in the historic preservation ordinance.

Section 5: Additions to Contributing Structures

An inventory of buildings within each historic district was prepared when the district was designated. That inventory classifies each building as *contributing* to the historic character of the district or *noncontributing*. This section includes guidelines for constructing additions to contributing buildings.

Section 6: Alterations and Additions to Noncontributing Structures

This section includes guidelines for alterations and additions to noncontributing buildings, since changes to noncontributing buildings should be compatible with nearby contributing buildings.

Section 7: New Construction

This section describes the appropriate massing, scale, materials, and design for new infill construction within these historic districts. It also includes the design standards for all new construction.

Section 8: Relocation and Demolition

This section includes guidelines for moving buildings into or out of a historic district, as well as guidelines for demolition of a building in a historic district.

Section 9: Additional Resources

This section includes information about topics that are not regulated by the City's historic preservation ordinance, but which might be helpful for property owners. It also includes links to free technical information about building materials and construction technology, published by the National Park Service, and an illustrated glossary of terms and definitions.

WHICH SECTIONS APPLY TO MY PROJECT?									
	Section 1: Introduction	Section 2: Preservation Fundamentals	Section 3: About the Historic Districts	Section 4: Exterior Alterations to Contributing Structures	Section 5: Additions to Contributing Structures	Section 6: Alterations and Additions to Noncontributing Structures	Section 7: New Construction	Section 8: Relocation and Demolition	Section 9: Additional Resources
Altering a contributing building, such as: • Replacing windows • Replacing siding	X	X	X	X					X
Altering a noncontributing building	X	X	X			X			X
Adding on to a contributing building	X	X	X		X				X
Adding on to a non-contributing building	X	X	X			X			X
Constructing a new building or structure, such as: • Building a new house • Building a new garage	X	X	X				X		X
Relocating a building or structure	X	X	X					X	X
Demolishing a building or structure	X	X						X	X

More than one of these project types may apply to a single Certificate of Appropriateness application.

Format of the design guidelines

Sections 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 include design guidelines for different types of projects. The information is organized, as much as possible, from general to specific. Each part includes text, photographs, and illustrations to explain the guidelines. Design standards often refer to minimum or maximum dimensions (or a range) and explain how to take those measurements.

The guidelines for a specific topic include the following elements:

Legend

A Topic

Describes the design topic addressed by the Design Guidelines that follow.

B Purpose

Explains the desired outcome for the design topic and provides a basis for the design guidelines that follow. If a guideline does not address a specific design issue, the intent statement will be used to determine appropriateness.

C Desired Outcomes

Describes a desired performance-oriented design outcome.

D Additional Information

Provides a bulleted list of suggestions on how to meet the intent of the design guideline. These are not the only alterations that can be applied.

E Images

Clarify the intent of the design guideline by illustrating appropriate and inappropriate design solutions (see below):

✓ Appropriate

Images marked with a check illustrate appropriate design solutions.

✗ Inappropriate

Images marked with an X illustrate inappropriate design solutions.

Sample Quantitative Guideline

A → **Historic Building Materials**

These design guidelines apply to all materials that are original to the building, including wood, stone, brick, metal, stucco, plaster, and concrete. Historic building materials should be preserved in place, as much as possible, and repaired when necessary. If the material is damaged beyond repair, only then should you consider replacing it. Only replace material that is damaged, and use replacement material that matches the original.

If historic materials have been covered, consider removing the covering; do this carefully, so that the underlying original building material is not damaged, and repair the original material as needed, once it is exposed.

C → **4.5 Preserve historic building materials.**

- Do not remove original material that is in good condition.
- Provide proper drainage away from historic materials to minimize damage to them. For example, provide storm drains, flashing, coping, gutters, etc.
- Do not cover or obscure historic building materials.
- Consider removing later covering materials that are inappropriate.

E →



Before: A historic house with inappropriate synthetic siding



After: The same house, after the historic siding was uncovered



Who should use these design guidelines?

This set of design guidelines are specifically for Houston Heights Historic District East, Houston Heights Historic District West, and Houston Heights Historic District South. People who own property in these districts and are considering projects should consult these guidelines as early as possible in the planning process.

Property owners should require their architects, contractors, and other building professionals to consult these design guidelines before beginning any design work.

Contact staff for assistance

Property owners should always consult with planners in the City's Historic Preservation Office for assistance before beginning design work, as well as during the planning and design of a project.

Visiting in person:

Historic Preservation Office
City of Houston Planning Department
611 Walker Street, 6th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002



Call the Historic Hotline at 832-393-6556.

Send email to historicpreservation@houstontx.gov.