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RESOLUTION NO. 20100610-029

WHEREAS, the City of Austin and its citizens have a strong interest in historic preservation, as evidenced in the Austin Tomorrow Plan and many subsequent planning documents which express a high value on preserving the city's unique character and heritage; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin, Austin Community College, Travis County, and the Austin Independent School District promote historic preservation by granting tax exemptions to historic properties; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin, as gatekeeper of the zoning process, must balance priorities of preservation with stewardship of the local tax base in the interest of culture, prosperity, education, and the general welfare of all its citizens; and

WHEREAS, historic preservation investments have broad positive impacts, including significant contributions to our local economy and our tax base; and

WHEREAS, historic preservation is consistent with the City's efforts to encourage sustainability, energy efficiency and green building, as well as striving to discourage landfill waste and suburban sprawl; and

WHEREAS, there has been a marked increase in the number of owner-initiated applications for landmark designations in the past two years; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin's landmark preservation program provides tax benefits to designated structures that are considerably larger than those provided elsewhere; and

WHEREAS, many cities tie property tax benefits of historic structures to rehabilitation to increase investment and encourage return of underused buildings to economic viability and limit the duration of property tax benefits to a fixed number of years; and

WHEREAS, there is rising concern regarding the tax impact of historic designations; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin includes many properties of architectural, historic, archeological, and cultural significance, some of which have not received historic designation or yet been identified as significant because there is no current survey of the city's historic assets upon which to base our planning; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin initiated its landmark preservation ordinance in 1974, adopted its preservation plan in 1981, and passed revisions to the program in 2004, 2006 and 2009; and

WHEREAS, the Historic Landmark Commission, by City Code, may recommend amendments to the code relating to historic preservation; and may advise the City Council on matters relating to historic preservation; and

WHEREAS, recommendations for changes to the historic property benefits will require time to develop and gather feedback on, making a temporary measure necessary; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

That Council hereby initiates and directs the City Manager to process amendments to the City Code to:

1. limit the number of owner-initiated and Historic Landmark Commission-initiated historic landmark nominations to three per month, except in the case of nominations initiated by the Commission in response to a request for a demolition or relocation permit; and
2. limit the number of owner-initiated and Historic Landmark Commission-initiated historic landmark nominations which are located in National Register or Local Historic Districts, other than those initiated by the Commission in response to a request for a demolition or relocation permit, to one per month, unless the other two slots for historic nominations are not completely filled, in which case they may be filled by nominations from National Register or Local Historic districts.

The City Manager is directed to confer as necessary with the Historic Landmark Commission and Planning Commission and make recommendations to Council on these amendments by August 5, 2010.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the City Manager is directed to:

1. Examine Historic landmark preservation practices in peer United States cities and identify best practices for identifying, designating and ensuring the preservation of historic properties;

2. work with the Historic Landmark Commission to prepare recommendations to limit the total amount of property tax exemption for each historic property to a fixed dollar amount per year and prepare recommendations on the proper size of this limit;
3. work with the Historic Landmark Commission to prepare recommendations on any other aspects of the historic property identification and designation process, the benefit structure for historic properties, and the allocation of City resources for historic preservation purposes; and
4. prepare an analysis of the economic benefits of historic preservation.

The City Manager is directed to return to Council with these recommendations and analysis no later than December 31, 2010.

ADOPTED: June 10, 2010

ATTEST: _____
Shirley A. Gentry
City Clerk