



FY2022-23 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION

Historic Landmark Commission Recommendation 20220328-4B

WHEREAS the City of Austin Historic Landmark Commission was established in 1974 to promote historic preservation activities in Austin and advise the Austin City Council on matters related to historic preservation; and

WHEREAS the purpose of the Historic Landmark Commission is to prepare and periodically revise an inventory of the structures and areas that may be eligible for designation as historic landmarks, most recently completed in 1984; prepare, review, and propose amendments to a citywide Historic Preservation Plan, last adopted in 1981; and review requests to establish or remove a historic designation and make recommendations on the requests to the Land Use Commission; and

WHEREAS the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan outlines historic preservation policies for the City of Austin to preserve and interpret historic resources in Austin for residents and visitors, with goals including 1) the inventory and protection of historic buildings, structures, sites, places, and districts in neighborhoods throughout the city; and 2) the retention of the character of locally designated historic districts and National Register districts by ensuring development is compatible with the historic character of the districts; and

WHEREAS Strategic Direction 2023 includes the honoring and preservation of historical and ethnic heritage as an indicator category, with strategies that include protecting places that reflect Austin's diverse history and broadening support for and participation in preserving underrepresented histories and resources; and

WHEREAS Austin has transformed since the existing Historic Preservation Plan was adopted in 1981, including a tripling of the city's population, passage of a historic district ordinance, urgent challenges around affordability and sustainability, a booming real estate market driving high development and demolition pressures, and displacement threats to longstanding residents, especially in East Austin neighborhoods historically home to communities of color; and

WHEREAS the historic preservation field has also transformed in the last 40 years, with equity, sustainability, and cultural heritage as leading factors guiding preservation efforts, and vernacular buildings and neighborhoods valued as critical to telling the full American story of racially and culturally diverse communities; and

WHEREAS studies and practices across the country have demonstrated that historic preservation can help meet other community goals such as equity, affordability, density, health, and sustainability, in addition to protecting places with cultural and historical significance; and

WHEREAS the Historic Landmark Commission and Historic Preservation Office seek to respond to 21st-century challenges with improved and new policies, programs, and tools, including transparent and accessible historic review processes, inclusive community outreach, and incentives that meet both historic preservation and equity goals; and

WHEREAS the Historic Landmark Commission created a 26-member community working group, the Preservation Plan Working Group, on June 28, 2021, to develop a draft of an equity-based historic preservation plan between July 2021 and June 2022 (phase 1 of the planning process); and

WHEREAS the Preservation Plan Working Group has been working diligently to complete the draft plan during monthly meetings, drawing on research from national best practices, employing an equity evaluation framework, and incorporating feedback from a community heritage survey, focus groups, a Technical Advisory Group of City staff, and the Preservation Plan Committee of the Historic Landmark Commission; and

WHEREAS phase 2 of the planning process will include extensive community engagement around the draft preservation plan, with community members, organizational and institutional stakeholders, board and commission members, and others invited to learn about the topics, prioritize recommendations, identify gaps, identify potential partners for implementation, and estimate costs for priority recommendations before the plan is presented to City Council for adoption; and

WHEREAS broad, inclusive community participation will be essential to ensure that the equity-based preservation plan reflects the full range of Austin's past and continuing heritage, is grounded in public values and priorities, and includes a range of activities and opportunities for engagement; and

WHEREAS community engagement should meaningfully prioritize communities and groups that have been historically underrepresented in public decision-making and historic preservation activities, such as communities of color, low-income households, renters, and LGBTQIA+ people; and

WHEREAS limited staff capacity and critical phase 2 scope items will require adding a project manager, partnering with an experienced community engagement consultant, and hiring community members as ambassadors to help facilitate effective, creative outreach;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Landmark Commission recommends that the Council allocate funds to the Housing & Planning Department in the amount of \$160,000 for FY2022-23 to implement phase 2 of the Equity-Based Historic Preservation Plan; and allocate an additional \$140,000 annually to fund one permanent staff position in the Historic Preservation Office to manage phase 2 of the preservation plan (expected to conclude summer 2023) and coordinate implementation of the preservation plan after its adoption. These resources are essential to engage the community in the preservation planning process, set equitable priorities for historic preservation policy, and begin to better meet the City of Austin's responsibilities to promote and preserve its intrinsic character and history.