

Frequently Asked Questions

This FAQ sheet is intended to provide a brief orientation to the Historic Design Standards. Please contact preservation@austintexas.gov if you have further questions.

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Why were the Historic Design Standards developed? Don't we already have standards for historic properties?

The Historic Design Standards were developed to clarify existing standards for historic landmarks and National Register districts. They will also make the historic district application process easier and more equitable for new districts.

The [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#) form the foundation of preservation practice in the United States and are used in Austin to evaluate proposed changes to historic landmarks and in National Register districts. However, these very general standards can be hard to interpret when planning and evaluating specific projects. The Historic Design Standards clarify them with more specific good practices and illustrations.

Right now, community members compiling a historic district application must hire a consultant or learn how to develop their own design standards. Then multiple rounds of review are required with other property owners and City staff. This adds time and cost to the application process—and results in design standards that are nearly identical to those for other districts. The Historic Design Standards will provide a consistent, predictable set of standards for all areas considering historic district designation.

2

I own a historic landmark. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will *clarify existing standards* for exterior changes to historic landmarks, as well as new construction on landmarked properties. The Historic Design Standards are based on the standards that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission already use to evaluate projects. However, they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use.

No process changes are proposed.

3

I own a property in a locally designated historic district. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

The Historic Design Standards will not affect previously agreed-upon design standards for existing historic districts. They do align with existing district design standards and may be adopted by property owners within each district if desired.

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I own a property in a National Register district. How will the Historic Design Standards affect me?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will *clarify existing guidelines* for National Register district properties. The Historic Design Standards are based on the standards that City staff and the Historic Landmark Commission already use to evaluate proposed projects. However, they are clearer, more specific, and easier to use.

Like the existing guidelines, the Historic Design Standards will be applied on an advisory basis. No process changes are proposed.

5

I'm interested in creating a historic district in my neighborhood. Will I be able to use the Historic Design Standards?

If adopted by City Council, the Historic Design Standards will apply to all newly designated historic districts. They will reduce the time and money required for the historic district application process and help property owners in potential districts clearly understand the benefits and responsibilities of district designation.

Property owners in new historic districts may create a supplement to the Historic Design Standards if they wish to add more specific requirements for their neighborhood.

HISTORIC DESIGN STANDARDS

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What projects will the Historic Design Standards apply to, if adopted?

The Historic Design Standards will apply to the projects on historic properties that currently go through historic review: exterior changes, additions, and stand-alone ground-up new construction.

Work on historic landmarks and in newly designated historic districts must meet the standards to be approved. Work in National Register districts will continue to be evaluated on an advisory basis.

7

How has the public helped shape the Historic Design Standards?

The community working group that developed the Historic Design Standards included property owners who will be affected by the standards, as well as community members with experience creating and implementing historic district design standards in their neighborhoods.

Many community members and the Historic Landmark Commission reviewed publicly available draft text in summer 2019 and submitted nearly 200 comments. These are reflected in the Historic Design Standards.

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All this sounds familiar. Have the Historic Design Standards been presented before?

Yes, the Historic Design Standards were presented to several City commissions in fall 2020. They were supported by all of them: the Historic Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning and Platting Commission, Design Commission, and Downtown Commission.

The standards are being brought back now for formal adoption into City code.

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How will the Historic Design Standards be adopted?

The Historic Landmark Commission will consider the Historic Design Standards on September 7 at 6 p.m. If it recommends the standards, they will be placed on the Planning Commission and City Council agendas. The City Council is the body that will formally adopt the standards.

