Recommendation for Action

File #: 22-3347, **Agenda Item #:** 23. 11/3/2022

Posting Language

Set a public hearing to consider an ordinance amending City Code Chapters 25-2 and 25-11 to codify Historic Design Standards. (Suggested date and location: December 1, 2022, Austin City Hall, 301 W. Second Street, Austin, Texas 78701.).

Lead Department

Housing and Planning.

Fiscal Note

This item has no fiscal impact.

For More Information:

Housing and Planning Department - Andrew Rice, ((512) 974-1686.

Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:

November 16, 2020 - Historic Landmark Commission recommended adoption of the Historic Design Standards.
September 27, 2022 - Planning Commission initiated Code amendments.
October 25, 2022 - Planning Commission to review ordinance.

Additional Backup Information:

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (the Secretary's Standards) form the foundation of preservation practice in the United States. In Austin, the Secretary's Standards are currently used 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. Property owners and designers can spend substantial resources to develop plans, and City staff or commissioners can reasonably disagree on whether they meet the Secretary's Standards. The Historic Design Standards clarify the Secretary's Standards 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 process adds time and cost to the application, with standards not finalized until late in the 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.

The Historic Design Standards will:

1. Create clearer standards for landmark and National Register district property owners;
2. Provide consistent standards between projects;
3. Provide an educational tool for everyone that is clearly worded and well-illustrated;

4. Follow good practices in preservation;
5. Streamline the historic district application process to be more equitable; and
6. Allow property owners in potential districts to see what standards would apply if the district were designated.

The Historic Design Standards promote sustainability by supporting the retention and repair of existing buildings, which keep old-growth wood and other material in use and out of the landfill. They also support sustainable solutions for making buildings more energy efficient, from high-impact improvements like attic insulation and duct sealing to Do It Yourself changes such as weather-stripping around windows and doors.

The Historic Design Standards were developed by a community working group appointed by the Historic Landmark Commission in fall 2018. The Design Standards Working Group included 21 property owners, designers, developers, advocates, Historic Landmark Commission members, and City staff. The working group released a draft version of the plan for public input in summer 2019 and received 175 comments from community stakeholders. After revising the draft based on those comments, the working group recommended the Historic Design Standards to the Historic Landmark Commission in fall 2020. The Historic Landmark Commission, Planning Commission, Zoning and Platting Commission, Design Commission, and Downtown Commission all adopted recommendations supporting Council adoption of the standards.

Strategic Outcome(s):

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