

# Historic Zoning

Prepared by the City Historic Preservation Office

Historic zoning is the City's process for providing recognition and protection to those houses and buildings which significantly represent Austin's architectural, social, and cultural history, and are therefore important for the community to preserve for the future.

Historic zoning occurs either by:

1. An application by the property owner for historic zoning.
2. A determination by the City Council that a building threatened with demolition is significant enough to preserve.

Process for historic zoning:

1. Recommendation from the Historic Landmark Commission;
2. Recommendation from the Land Use Commission (Planning or Zoning and Platting);
3. Approval by City Council.

Candidates for historic landmark designation (historic zoning) must meet at least 2 criteria for designation as set out in the Land Development Code, Section 25-2-352. The two most common criteria for historic zoning are (1) architectural merit and (2) historical associations with persons or events of historical significance.

Architectural significance does not entail just high-style buildings; vernacular buildings are also recognized as significant because of their architecture and the stories they represent. Likewise, historical associations are not limited to the biggest "movers and shakers" in Austin society. Austin recognizes the contributions of those people who had a significant impact on the economic, social, and cultural life of the city, by encouraging the preservation of the buildings representing the style, means, and context of every social and economic class and group. We have a landmark house in East Austin that was built by a freed slave whose narrative appears in the Travis County Freed Slave narratives. Preserving this house preserves the story of her life, and represents how she lived. It is important to keep that history alive.

Owners of historic landmarks must seek the approval of the Historic Landmark Commission (through a Certificate of Appropriateness) for changes to the exterior or the site of the historic landmark. The City Historic Preservation Office has the authority to administratively approve certain, more minor changes to historic landmarks without requiring a Commission decision.

Owners of historic landmarks may also be eligible for a property tax incentive from the City of Austin, Travis County, and the Austin Independent School District. The applicant must file an affidavit detailing that the property is in need of tax relief to encourage its preservation in accordance with the Texas Tax Code, and the structure must be well-maintained in order for the applicant to be eligible for the tax exemption. Owners must apply every year for the tax exemption, and the City Historic Preservation Office staff inspects every landmark every year to ensure their continued preservation.