



## Annual Internal Review

This report covers the time period of 7/1/2018 to 6/30/2019

# Historic Landmark Commission

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**The Board/Commission mission statement (per the City Code) is:**

Pursuant to Section 2-1-147(B) of the Code of the City of Austin, the Historic Landmark Commission:

1. Shall prepare and periodically revise an inventory of the structures and areas that may be eligible for designation as historic landmarks.
2. Shall prepare, review, and propose amendments to the Historic Landmark Preservation Plan.
3. Shall review requests to establish or remove a historic designation and make recommendations on the requests to the Land Use Commission, as determined in accordance with Section 25-1-46 of the Code of the City of Austin.
4. Shall provide information and counseling to owners of structures that are designated as historic structures.
5. May initiate zoning or rezoning of property to establish or remove a historic designation.
6. May recommend amendments to the Code of the City of Austin relating to historic preservation.
7. May recommend that the City acquire property if the Commission finds that acquisition by the City is the only means by which to preserve the property.
8. May advise the Council on matters relating to historic preservation.
9. For an object that is not permanently affixed to land, may recommend that Council confer special historic designation, and
10. Shall perform other duties as prescribed by the Code of the City of Austin or other ordinance.

**1. Describe the board's actions supporting their mission during the previous calendar year. Address all elements of the board's mission statement as provided in the relevant sections of the City Code.**

1. The Commission references several surveys in their evaluation of historical significance for properties subject to applications for demolition permits, relocation permits, and building permits within National Register and locally-designated historic districts. The surveys used by the Commission include the East Austin Survey (1980), the Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey (1984), the Clarksville Survey (2000), the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Street East Austin Survey (2001), the Chestnut Neighborhood Survey (2001), and the multi-volume East Austin Historic Resources Survey, completed in 2016. Other sources of information for the Commission include lists of contributing (and non-contributing) properties within the City's 16 National Register Historic Districts and 5 locally-designated historic districts.

The biggest accomplishments of the past year were the nomination and successful prosecution of new local historic districts: Smoot/Terrace Park on the west side of Austin, the East Mary Street local historic district in South Austin, and the Robertson/Stuart and Mair Historic District in East Austin. These districts encompass over 180 houses of historic age that contribute to the character of each district, and provide greater protection from demolition as well as establishing design standards for additions to existing contributing buildings and new construction within each district. The design standards help ensure that even with new construction, there is a greater awareness and sensitivity to the character of the historic district. Smoot/Terrace Park was part of the West Line National Register Historic District, which had no protections from demolition over and above what exists for any property in the city, and no design standards for new construction and additions. Smoot/Terrace Park has 87 buildings that contribute to the character of the district that now have enhanced protection. The East Mary Street Historic district had no previous designation, and no protections from demolition or design standards for new construction. The East Mary Street Historic District has 16 contributing buildings which now have greater protection from demolition. The Robertson/Stuart & Mair Historic District in East Austin also had no previous designation and no protections from demolition or design standards for new construction. The creation of each of these historic districts helps manage change in historically-significant and sensitive neighborhoods in a fast-growing city.

2. The City's Preservation Plan dates from 1981, and is part of the City's Imagine Austin plan, which addressed historic preservation issues into the comprehensive plan for the city. City staff and the Commission were active in the CodeNext process for revising the City's Land Development Code, and the Commission will participate in the proposed Code changes relating to historic preservation.

Commission members are currently serving on and reviewing proposed new City-wide Design Standards for historic landmarks and contributing properties in historic districts. This effort will provide one set of standards for additions and modifications to protected buildings throughout the city, as well as for new construction in historic districts. City Code provides that each local historic district shall have a preservation plan that includes design standards; the Commission's work in developing a universal set of standards is an important step in preservation planning on a city-wide basis.

3. Each month, the Commission reviews applications for historic zoning as part of its regular business at public meetings. In 2018-19, the Commission reviewed nineteen (19) applications for historic zoning. Eight (8) of those applications were brought to the

Commission by the property owner, including one (1) that had originally stemmed from an application for a demolition permit, but were converted to voluntary applications for historic zoning instead. The house that had owner “conversion” is in East Austin – the Ellison House in Cedar Valley, a subdivision platted after World War II for returning African-American veterans. The Commission recommended seven (7) of the applications owner-initiated applications for historic zoning; the eighth was withdrawn by the applicant. The remainder of the cases seven (7) were initiated by the Commission in response to applications for demolition; none of these were ultimately recommended for historic zoning.



*The Hillside Drug Store was one of the first pharmacies owned and operated by a professional African-American pharmacist, U.S. Young. This drug store was a center of the old African-American business district at the junction of E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Rosewood Avenue.*



*Cisco's Bakery and Restaurant on E. 6<sup>th</sup> Street was recommended for historic zoning by the Commission in 2019. The ca. 1914 building was originally a meat market. In 1955, Rudy Cisneros opened his bakery and coffee shop in this building. Cisneros was the unofficial "Mayor of East Austin" and was a driving force in East Austin politics. Prominent politicians from throughout the state, including Lyndon Johnson, came to Cisco's to discuss policies and converse with Rudy Cisneros about issues affecting the Mexican-American population of the neighborhood.*

4. The Commission's Certificate of Appropriateness Review Committee is made up of 3 Commission members, representing a wide range of knowledge in terms of architecture and architectural history. The Committee meets monthly (two weeks prior to the full Commission meeting), and provides a preliminary review of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness for designated historic landmarks and for properties within locally-designated historic districts. The Committee will also review applications for building permits in National Register Historic Districts upon request. The Committee reviews an average of eleven (11) applications each month in an informal setting where the applicant presents the proposal to the Committee members, who then work closely with the applicant to ensure a successful proposal at the full Commission. The Committee has been extremely helpful and effective in guiding applicants towards approval of their applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation as well as the design standards established for locally-designated historic districts.

5. As part of its regular monthly public meetings, the Commission reviews applications for the demolition or relocation of potentially historic properties, and may initiate a historic zoning

case to gather more information about the history of a property before deciding to recommend the case for historic zoning to the Planning Commission and the City Council. In 2018-19, the Commission initiated a historic zoning case on twelve (12) applications for demolition of a potentially historic structure. None of these cases were ultimately recommended for historic zoning by the Commission, but one, the Ellison House on Leslie Avenue in Cedar Valley, was designated as a historic landmark when the owner withdrew his application for demolition and sought historic zoning instead.



*The ca. 1966 Chester and Linda McKinney House on Farhills Drive in northwest Austin is an excellent example of mid-century Modern architecture with a design by prominent local architect David Barrow. The application for the demolition of this house was released by the Commission after failing to get the requisite number of votes by the Commission to recommend it for landmark designation.*

6. The Commission works closely with City staff to identify and process amendments to City Code sections dealing with historic preservation issues.

7. The Commission did not have occasion to recommend that the City acquire property to preserve a property in 2018-19.

8. The Commission recommended historic zoning for seven (7) properties in 2018-19.

9. The Commission did not have occasion to recommend historic zoning for an object not specifically affixed to land in 2018-19.

10. The Commission did not have occasion to perform other duties as prescribed by Code or ordinance, other than the activities described above.

**2. Determine if the board’s actions throughout the year comply with the mission statement.**

Every action of the Historic Landmark Commission has complied with the mission statement and applicable City Code sections relating to the Commission and historic preservation in 2018-19.

**3. List the board’s goals and objectives for the new calendar year.**

*(Make sure the goals and objectives fall within the mission statement of the board/commission.)*

In addition to continuing the regular work described above, the Commission intends to evaluate the city’s historic district sign ordinance, and improve the effectiveness of historic preservation efforts in Austin, especially in the creation of locally-designated historic districts. Ongoing work includes the creation of city-wide design standards for historic landmarks and historic districts.

Historic Preservation Office staff held a training session for Commissioners in December, 2018 to discuss the roles, duties, and activities of the Commissioners and Commission and introduce new concepts for design review in historic districts.