

# Equity-Based Preservation Plan: Learning from Our Past to Shape a Future for Everyone

**DRAFT FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION REVIEW**

## **Please read**

This draft is offered for Historic Landmark Commission review in September 2022. It may be revised. Broad, inclusive outreach and engagement efforts will invite community review and feedback in early 2023.

We appreciate your interest! Staff currently does not have capacity to accept community feedback on the draft framework, but please see below for ways that you can participate now. And stay tuned for the outreach and engagement campaign later this fall!

### **What you can do now:**

- Learn more about the equity-based preservation planning process on [our website](#)!
- [Sign up for the project email list](#) to get notified of feedback opportunities and events!
- Tell us what's important to you in a [community priorities survey](#)!

# Land acknowledgment

We wish to recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples as original stewards of the land known as Austin, Texas, and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. Recognizing the land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we reside on and a way of honoring the Indigenous Peoples who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial. Land acknowledgments do not exist in the past tense or historical context. Colonialism is a current and ongoing process, and we need to be mindful that we are participating in it by living on colonized land.

We acknowledge, with respect, that the land known as Texas is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Tonkawa, the Apache, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, the Lipan Apache Tribe, the Texas Band of Yaqui Indians, the Coahuiltecan, and all other tribes not explicitly stated. Additionally, we acknowledge and pay respects to the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, the Kickapoo Tribe of Texas, Carrizo & Comecrudo, Choctaw, Tigua Pueblo, Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa, Wichita, Chickasaw, Waco nations, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island, the ancestral name for what is now known as North America. Not all Indigenous peoples listed claim Texas as ancestral lands, as many were forcibly relocated to Texas from their ancestral homelands.

It is important to understand the long history that has brought us to reside on the land and to seek to acknowledge our place within that history. The state of Texas is a product of violence carried out by Anglo and Mexican colonial powers. Multiple genocides were committed on the native peoples of Central Texas as they were hunted, detained, converted, and colonized in successive waves. Many were also assimilated, including most peoples labeled Coahuiltecan and many Lipan-Apache, with no treaties or recognition.

At its best, historic preservation seeks to recognize and honor the complex layers of multiple stories and to support community stewardship of place. However, the field has often excluded, ignored, or dismissed nonwhite people and narratives in what it celebrates and whom it serves. It has emphasized the high-style architecture of the ruling classes to the exclusion of the people who add meaning. Today, the ongoing displacement of communities of color is connected to legacies of land theft, landscape transformation, and cultural loss and erasure. Therefore, we must be intentional about how we build respect for The Land and her Indigenous Peoples.

*NOTE: Most of the text for this land acknowledgment was drawn directly from the City of Austin Climate Equity Plan adopted in 2021.*

# Vision for historic preservation

Historic preservation in Austin actively engages communities in protecting and sharing important places and stories. Preservation uses the past to create a shared sense of belonging and to shape an equitable, inclusive, sustainable, and economically vital future for all.

## Executive summary

Much has changed in Austin since 1981, when the last historic preservation plan was adopted. The city's population has nearly tripled, a historic district ordinance was passed, and affordable housing and density have become pressing issues. Displacement pressures threaten long-standing residents, especially in East Austin neighborhoods historically home to communities of color. Meanwhile, buildings that were new then are nearing historic age themselves.

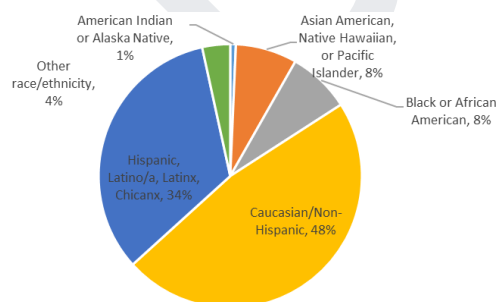
The preservation field has also transformed in the last 40 years. Equity, sustainability, and cultural heritage are leading factors guiding planning and conversations around historic preservation. Preservation now recognizes the critical role of vernacular buildings in telling the stories of racially and culturally diverse communities.

An inclusive, equity-based, and community-oriented historic preservation plan will help the City Council, Historic Landmark Commission, and Historic Preservation Office, as well as other City departments and partners, respond to 21st-century challenges with improved policies, programs, and tools. These may include transparent and accessible historic review processes, inclusive community outreach, and incentives that meet both historic preservation and equity goals.

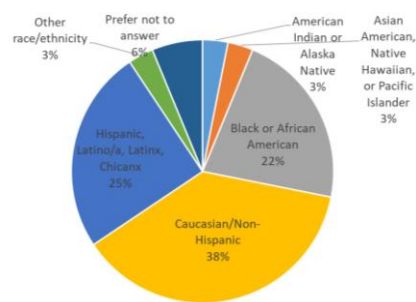
## Community-based process

This document is the result of a year-long collaborative process. Drafted by a 26-person community working group, it is the framework for a full preservation plan. Here, it is offered as a draft for Historic Landmark Commission review and revision, prior to inviting broad community feedback. The final plan will integrate that feedback, add priorities informed by stakeholder conversations, and lay out the timeline and resources needed for implementation.

### Preservation Plan Working Group



*Austin*



*Working group*

**DRAFT FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK COMMISSION REVIEW**  
COMMUNITY FEEDBACK WILL BE INVITED LATER IN FALL 2022

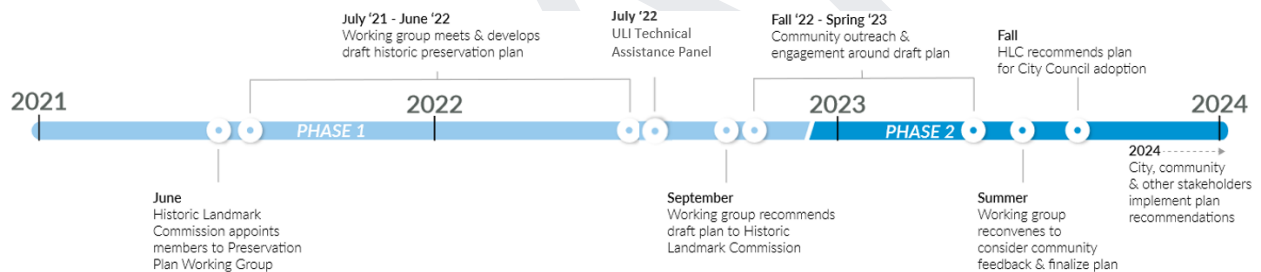
Members live in 19 ZIP codes [insert map] and contributed more than 1,100 hours over the yearlong process of developing the draft framework.

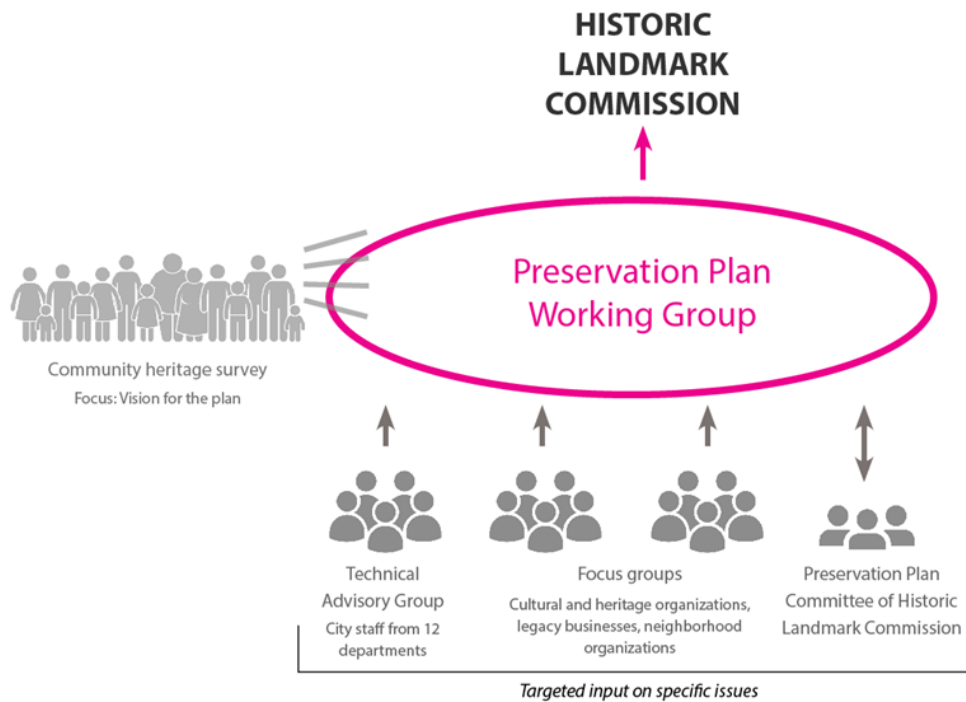
Equity means striving to ensure all members of the Austin community, regardless of background or identity, positively benefit from the plan. The planning process seeks to advance racial equity and elevate equitable outcomes for all people as they relate to historic preservation and community heritage. Including members of historically marginalized groups as essential members of the Preservation Plan Working Group helped to elevate the voices of members of our community who have historically been harmed by public policies.

What do we mean by historically marginalized groups?

Historically marginalized groups are people who have historically been left out of, misrepresented by, or ignored by City processes and outcomes, either intentionally or unintentionally. They include people of color, low-income households, people with disabilities, renters, women, and LGBTQ+ people.

This plan recognizes the importance of identity and tries to be specific, both in language and acknowledging the complexity of communities' histories. For example, before many Mexican Americans were "Mexican Americans," they were Indigenous people who took on Spanish-sounding names. The Tonkawa were particularly friendly to the colonizers, and their descendants are still in Austin and Central Texas. The Ndé Kónitsaqíí Gokiyaa (Lipan Apaches) and Tonkawa tribes were more nomadic but stewarded the lands in Austin as they moved through the area. Many were forcibly removed, but many still call Central Texas their home.





## Criteria for success

Early in the planning process, the Preservation Plan Working Group defined ten criteria for success. These criteria were used to assess draft recommendations and the draft framework itself.

1. **Vision:** Does the plan offer a clear vision for historic preservation that can be used by stakeholders to communicate and collaborate? Do all recommendations support that vision?
2. **Process:** Has the process of developing the preservation plan been welcoming and accessible to community members with a range of viewpoints, regardless of previous preservation experience?
3. **Education:** Does the plan educate readers about the benefits of historic preservation and how preservation relates to key topics such as property rights, displacement, economic opportunities, and affordability? Does it equip community members, policymakers, and City staff to take action?
4. **Expansion:** Does the plan recognize historically marginalized people, places, and stories? Does it expand what is considered historically significant?
5. **Effectiveness:** Are the plan's recommendations for policies, programs, and incentives grounded in good practices from around the U.S. and the world? Are they likely to result in the recognition, preservation, and/or interpretation of more historic resources?
6. **Practicality:** Does the plan balance big-picture thinking with specific, actionable, measurable recommendations that recognize legal constraints? Does the plan include a realistic strategy for regular updates?
7. **Accessibility:** Does the plan recommend ways to make historic preservation processes more accessible to community members, especially those who aren't familiar with the processes? Is the plan itself easy to understand?

8. **Equity:** Are the expected benefits of the plan's recommendations equitably distributed? Are negative impacts minimized, particularly for communities that have historically been disadvantaged by public policies?
9. **Connection:** Does the plan support affordability (as with tax incentives), economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability, particularly for historically marginalized communities?
10. **Support:** Is the plan supported by working group members, policymakers, City departments, allied organizations, and community members?

## Supporting other goals

This plan intersects with many other City plans. After adoption, it should be used alongside those plans to reinforce and coordinate cross-departmental goals, policies, and programs.

Overlapping priorities from a few plans are listed below. Additional related plans will be included in the final plan: Our Parks, Our Future; Historic Cemeteries Master Plan; the Austin Climate Equity Plan, the Comprehensive Framework for Economic Districts, and more.

### Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan

- Preserve and interpret historic resources (objects, buildings, structures, sites, places + districts with historic, cultural + aesthetic significance) for residents and visitors (LUT P37)
- Protect historic buildings, structures, sites, places, and districts in neighborhoods throughout the city (LUT P41)

### Strategic Direction 2023 (SD23)

- Ensure Austin's historical narrative is comprehensive and accurate by partnering with the community to protect, preserve, and share the character of Austin's cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history (CLL-5)

### Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint

- Prevent households from being priced out of Austin
- Foster equitable, integrated, and diverse communities
- Invest in housing for those most in need
- Create (and preserve) affordable housing choices

## Next steps

We intend to have some engagement opportunities in the fall around this draft. More robust outreach and engagement will begin in early 2023 with a consultant and community ambassadors. Community members, organizational and institutional stakeholders, board and commission members, and others will be invited to:

- Learn about the draft plan
- Suggest changes to draft recommendations and identify gaps
- Prioritize draft recommendations
- Identify potential partners for implementation

Outreach and engagement will prioritize groups that have been historically marginalized in public decision-making and underrepresented in historic preservation activities. This phase will also include cost estimates for high-priority recommendations.

At the end of this phase, the equity-based preservation plan will be finalized and formally presented to the Historic Landmark Commission and other boards and commissions whose work intersects with historic preservation. Finally, it will go to City Council for review and adoption.

## Funding acknowledgment

This project is funded in part through a Certified Local Government Grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, a grant program administered by the Texas Historical Commission.

## Equity in Austin

Austin's long history of systemic racism led to disparities in housing, transportation, health, education, and economic outcomes. Many of the racial inequities that exist today are a direct result of past and current laws, ordinances, and city planning.

The advent of formal planning with the 1928 City Plan increased deep-rooted racism in municipal documents. This reinforced existing prejudices in the private sector; private developers had excluded homebuyers based on their race as early as 1872. As Austin grew, City leaders made targeted decisions around land use and public investments that lowered property values and decimated communities in segregated East Austin. This helped ensure that white property owners profited and communities of color continued to struggle to meet basic needs.

Austin's City Council established the Historic Landmark Commission in 1974. Until relatively recently, the Commission prioritized preservation of architecturally grand buildings and the homes of wealthy citizens, typically white men.



All locally designated historic resources with connections to historically marginalized groups



Recently designated historic resources with connections to communities of color (2019-20)

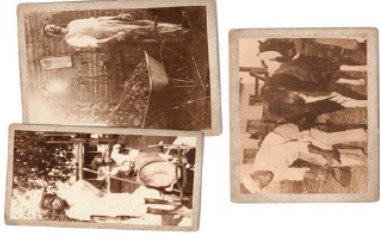


## Timeline

# Root causes and current-day inequities

Austin's long history of systemic racism led to disparities in housing, transportation, health, education, and economic outcomes. Many of the racial inequities that exist today are a direct result of past and current laws, ordinances, and city planning.

**DISPLACEMENT OF FREEDOM COLONIES**  
Communities such as Clarksville, Wheatville, Kincheonville, Masontown, and Gregorytown were established by formerly enslaved people after the Civil War and interspersed throughout the city and its outskirts. To enforce racial segregation and the relocation of Black families to East Austin, the City denied them the public services enjoyed by surrounding neighborhoods such as paved streets, sidewalks, street lighting, sewers, and flood control measures. Clarksville's streets were not paved until the 1970s. Meanwhile, racist local policies and discriminatory banking practices made it difficult for residents to maintain or improve their homes.



**ISOLATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS, SEIZURE OF PROPERTY, AND LYNCHING**  
Following the Mexican-American War, those of Mexican descent were isolated within the Republic of Texas and later the State of Texas. Only white men were allowed to vote and have representation in government. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexican citizens in Texas were allowed to retain Mexican citizenship or become U.S. citizens. Those who held property and personal wealth after the Mexican-American War often lost it due to questionable land sales and lawsuits. White Texans were almost as likely to lynch Mexican American men as they were to lynch African Americans.

**GENOCIDE AND COLONIZATION OF NATIVE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**  
Multiple genocides were committed on the native people of Central Texas. Natives were hunted, detained, converted, and colonized in successive waves of white, Mexican, and other occupations. Amongst the violence, Natives were racialized in a way that slated them for extermination and denied them the most basic notion of human agency. Ethnic cleansing as a strategy, sometimes explicit—sometimes implicit—was thoroughly employed.

**ENSLAVEMENT AND COLONIZATION OF AFRICAN PEOPLE**  
Exploitation of the labor of enslaved African people was part of Texas's original colonization under Spanish rule. Despite being outlawed under Mexican rule following independence from Spain, Stephen F. Austin and many white settlers actively worked to guarantee their right to hold slaves. Slavery was legal in the Republic of Texas and free Black people were banished. The enslavement of Black people continued when Texas joined the United States and, later, the Confederate States of America. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation legally ended slavery, white plantation owners refused to release their enslaved workers until Federal troops were sent to Texas two years later. Discrimination and violence by white people against Black people continued for many decades in the Jim Crow South.

**VIGILANTE TARGETING AND REMOVAL OF MEXICAN AMERICANS**  
Many white Austinites saw Mexican Americans as a transient class that instilled "false notions of freedom" in enslaved people, even though Mexican Americans as a group were long-established in the area. A vigilante committee led by the mayor and other prominent citizens worked to forcibly remove all Mexican Americans from Travis County unless vouched for by whites. They drove out about twenty families. The few Mexican Americans who remained in Travis County—only 20 people in 1860—were given a curfew. The local Mexican American population remained low throughout the Civil War, although records indicate that Mexican Americans fought on both sides of the war. Most Mexican Americans did not return to Travis County until the mid-1870s.

**EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRANTS WERE PROHIBITED FROM OWNING PROPERTY**  
Discriminatory laws denied Chinese immigrants (who were prohibited from citizenship under federal law) the right to own property in Austin. The spouses of these immigrants could be stripped of their U.S. citizenship and its benefits.



*"No Peon [Mexican American] remains in the city, who is not vouched for by respectable citizens. It should be the duty of every citizen to aid in preserving the present state of things."*  
- State Gazette

Timeline text from the *Nothing About Us Without Us: Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool* report except isolation of Mexican Americans and vigilante targeting. Image credits: Clarksville images, n.d. (Clarksville Community Development Corporation); Joe and Dora Lung, n.d. (Lung House National Register nomination)



# Root causes and current-day inequities

## THE 1928 CITY PLAN FOR AUSTIN AND CREATION OF A SEGREGATED "NEGRO DISTRICT"

Through early 20th century zoning and planning policy, the City established a "Negro District" designed to keep Black people separated from whites. City planners were aware of the fact that they could not legally zone neighborhoods across racial lines, but they recommended the creation of a "Negro District" because the largest Black population was already located in East Austin. This district was the only part of the city where Black people could access schools, public utilities, and other public services. However, the City underfunded public services in the district, and private developers refused to provide utilities as an alternative option for residents, as was common in white neighborhoods. Streets in some parts of the district were not paved until the 1960s and 1970s. The district was also the area with the fewest zoning restrictions.

// *There has been considerable talk in Austin, as well as other cities, in regard to the race segregation problem. This problem cannot be solved legally under any zoning law known to us at present. In our studies in Austin, we have found that the negroes are present in small numbers, in practically all sections of the city, excepting the area just east of East Avenue and south of the City Cemetery. This area seems to be all negro population. It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will be the recommendation of this district as a negro district...*

- 1928 City Plan

Beginning with the 1928 City Plan, the advent of formal planning injected deep-rooted racism into municipal documents. As Austin grew, these plans ensured that white property owners profited and communities of color continued to struggle to meet basic needs.



## RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS AND SEGREGATED PUBLIC HOUSING

A form of tri-racial segregation that used "caucasian only" or "white only" in private deeds and covenants emerged. This marked a shift from the previously used language of "no people of African descent" and was a direct response to the increased numbers of people from Mexico or of "Mexican descent." This tri-racial system prohibited both Black and Latinx people from buying or renting homes in many neighborhoods outside of East Austin. These deed restrictions were often required by the Federal Housing Administration to even secure financing for the construction of housing.

In the late 1930s, the City Council voted to build racially segregated public housing, Santa Rita Courts for Mexican Americans, Rosewood Courts (for African Americans) and Chalmers Courts (for whites), the first federal public housing projects in the nation, all located in East Austin.

1928

1930s

## REMOVAL OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

Parts of Austin's old First Ward and settlements along Shoal Creek were predominantly Mexican and Mexican American. The increased land value resulting from stabilization of the Colorado River and the rise of "downtown" Austin's business district pushed out Mexican American residents, businesses, and churches.

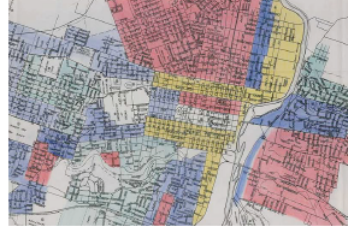


1935-->

1930s

## REDLINING

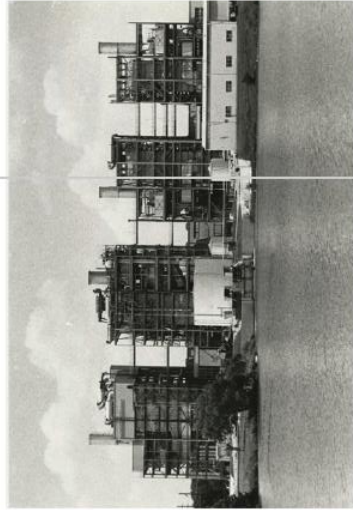
The segregation and concentration of people and industrial uses in Austin was further perpetuated by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), established in 1933 by Congress to refinance mortgages in default and prevent foreclosures. In 1935 the corporation created residential security maps for 239 cities to guide government-backed mortgages and other loans. The maps graded areas considered "best" for lending as Type A. These areas were primarily wealthy suburbs on the outskirts of town. "Still Desirable" neighborhoods were given a Type B grade, and older neighborhoods were given a Type C grade and considered "Declining." Type D neighborhoods were labeled "Hazardous" and regarded as most risky for loans. Austin's Type D areas closely followed the boundaries of the "Negro District." It meant that families seeking to purchase property in the area—most often Black families—could not access loans with favorable terms. Families that did purchase property had to go through white intermediary buyers or purchase small houses and add on later as they saved more money. Redlining also limited Black property owners in maintaining, repairing, and adding to their buildings; as only personal funds were available and contributed to the later perception of these neighborhoods as "slums." The map also called out a "Mexican District."



Timeline text from the *Nothing About Us Without Us: Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool* report  
Image credits: *Diary of a Salesman* (ca. 1920s) (PCA 36924, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library); *Rosewood Courts*, 1934 (459L\_DM-54-C 1897, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library); HOLC map, 1935

# Root causes and current-day inequities

After the 1928 City Plan and other factors segregated the city, City leaders made targeted decisions around land use and urban renewal that lowered property values and decimated communities in East Austin.



## RACIALLY RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS UPHELD AS LEGAL

The 1949 Supreme Court decision in *Shelley v. Kraemer* confirmed that racially restrictive covenants did not violate the 14th Amendment, but they could not be judicially enforced. Still, developers and neighborhoods continued to create racially restrictive covenants to exclude non-whites from buying or renting houses in segregated neighborhoods.

1949

1950s

## INTERPRETATION FOCUSED ON STORIES OF WHITE PEOPLE

Restoration efforts were undertaken at the French Legation and Neill-Cochran House in Austin. While both museums now address the histories of enslaved people and broader communities that grew up around the sites, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and other communities of color were largely ignored in early interpretation.



## INDUSTRIAL ZONING IN EAST AUSTIN

The Austin Master Plan (1956) and Industrial Development Plan (1957) designated large swaths of Austin as an industrial zone. These plans guaranteed that polluting industries were located in primarily communities of color and resulted in hazardous living conditions, lowered property values, and the construction of toxic properties like the Tank Farm and Holly Street Power Plant. Lower property values meant that property owners lost wealth, made it difficult to get loans to maintain and expand their buildings, and opened the door to predatory buying practices in later years.

1957

1958



## CONSTRUCTION OF I-35

On August 21, 1958, City Council approved the land acquisition to expand East Avenue into I-35, seizing property from predominantly Black and Mexican American households. While racial segregation in Austin predated the construction of I-35, the new highway physically divided the city when it was completed in the early 1960s. Mexican American children attending segregated Palm School had to walk over the freeway. I-35 continues to harm surrounding communities' health.

1960s

## URBAN RENEWAL OR "URBAN REMOVAL"

This federally funded program subsidized the acquisition and clearing of sites for redevelopment by tearing down slums and "blighted" areas. Less than 1% of funding went to assisting residents with relocation. Austin's urban renewal efforts focused primarily on areas with majority Black and Latinx populations such as Brackenridge (1969), University East (1968), Kealing (1966), and Blackshear (1969). The projects displaced people of color from large areas and turned formerly residential land into parks and schools without providing adequate opportunities for displaced households to return. The program therefore became known by many people of color as "urban removal."

Timeline text from the *Nothing About Us Without Us: Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool* report, except racially restrictive covenants and interpretation. Image credits: Dependency (slave quarters) at Neill-Cochran House Museum (Neill-Cochran House Museum); Holly Street Power Plant, ca. 1970 (PICA 14501, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library); I-35 construction, 1960 (tearstreeway.com)



# Root causes and current-day inequities

Austin's City Council established the Historic Landmark Commission in 1974. Until relatively recently, the Commission prioritized preservation of architecturally grand buildings and the homes of wealthy citizens, typically white men.

## EXCLUSIVE EARLY PRESERVATION ORDINANCE AND ADVOCACY

The City of Austin passed the Historic Landmark Preservation Ordinance. The ordinance established the Historic Landmark Commission and a process for designating historic landmarks: exemplary or unique buildings linked to prominent community members. Early efforts focused almost exclusively on buildings built by white people in the 19th century. The 1981 Austin Historic Preservation Plan sought to guide and expand the new program, but it has not been updated to reflect Austin's growth—or the preservation field's embrace of greater racial and cultural diversity and vernacular buildings and neighborhoods.

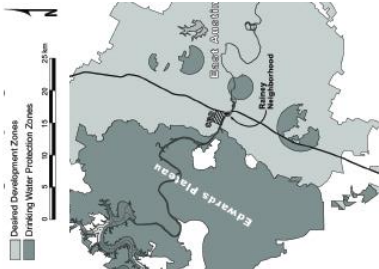
## CLOSURE OF L. C. ANDERSON HIGH SCHOOL AND Busing

Beginning in 1889, L. C. Anderson High School witnessed decades of changes in Black public education. AISD constructed a new school in 1953 in an attempt to forestall integration, finally providing Black students with decent resources and providing a community gathering place. AISD closed Anderson in 1971 after white students refused to enroll there as part of federally ordered desegregation. African American students were bused to historically white schools in West Austin.



## ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ORDINANCES DIRECTING INTENSIVE DEVELOPMENT TO EAST AUSTIN

In the early 1990s, primarily white West Austin homeowners successfully advocated for stricter development-control ordinances like the Drinking Water Protection Zone over the Edwards Aquifer. By the late 1990s, the City established the Desired Development Zone (DDZ) to steer development and redevelopment away from environmentally sensitive areas in West Austin to East Austin, which led to gentrification and displacement of Black and Latinx people. These plans are still actively referenced to target East Austin.



1966

## NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

The National Historic Preservation Act was one of multiple laws meant to consider the impacts of government action and give local communities a voice in decision-making, in response to interstate highways and urban renewal. The basis of modern historic preservation practice in the U.S., the far-reaching Act established the National Register of Historic Places. Biases in National Register designation criteria and their use have emphasized more elaborate and unchanged sites over modest, modified, or lost resources, resulting in inadequate recognition of places significant to communities of color at the national level and in the many municipalities that modeled their own designation criteria on the National Register.

1971

## CONSTRUCTION OF MOPAC

In 1971, the construction of the Mopac Expressway destroyed nearly one third of the homes in the historic Clarksville Freedom Colony. This displaced thirty Black families. When the Crosstown Expressway project threatened to wipe out the other half of the neighborhood, Clarksville residents took the City to court, got the neighborhood removed from the freeway plans, and won state and federal historic designations for the neighborhood.

Mrs. Brews was one of about 30 Clarksville families displaced by Mopac. A long stretch of street time-room home she lived in once stood. "Mopac is a dirty word to me. It took my home and nobody cared. I never did get paid enough to replace what I had before," said the Black woman.

Only about five or six families relocated in Clarksville. Mrs. Brews moved to either East or West Austin. Mrs. Brews said, "Mrs. Brews was spokesperson for Clarksville residents who organized in 1969 to fight the highway department's to court, charging the officials with failure to comply with federal

1974

## 1984 HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

The first large-scale survey in Austin focused only on architecture, rating larger, high-style buildings as higher priority for more research. This approach reflected preservation philosophy at the time, but it ignored the value of smaller houses in working-class neighborhoods. As a result, local preservation efforts benefited wealthier, historically white neighborhoods over communities of color.

1984

## LATE RECOGNITION OF LGBTQ HISTORIC SITES NATIONALLY

The first major recognition of LGBTQ historic sites did not occur until the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising, when a volunteer organization published the first guide to lesbian and gay historic sites in the U.S. The Stonewall Inn was designated at the national level in 1999 and at the local level in 2015. Identifying historically significant LGBTQ sites remains a challenge. Most sites were secret or transient due to safety concerns, and homosexual acts were illegal until 2003.

1994

1990s

Timeline text from the *Nothing About Us Without Us: Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool* report except L. C. Anderson closure, survey, and LGBTQ sites

Image credits: East Austin students during busing, 1971 (PICA 10494, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library); "Clarksville efforts redoubled" Austin Statesman (2/19/70); "Clarksville finally gets recognition, help" Austin American-Statesman (2/8/1970); North Austin's Anderson House, one of the first historic landmarks designated in Austin (originalaustin.org); Desired Development Zone map, 2016 (Blot, Peter and Elabehn J. Mueller, "Transforming Rainey Street")

# Root causes and current-day inequities

## REZONING OF RAINNEY STREET

Located near downtown, the Rainey Street neighborhood was occupied by Mexican American families beginning in 1935, after earlier white residents moved to the suburbs. Developers expressed interest, but the neighborhood association advocated for anti-displacement measures and more affordable housing in its 1980 Rainey Barrio Preservation Plan. The area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. Twenty years later, the City rezoned the Rainey neighborhood to Central Business District, which allowed virtually unlimited commercial and multi-family development, led to skyrocketing property taxes, and left families with no choice but to sell their longtime homes.

## LATE HISTORIC DISTRICT LEGISLATION

In 2006, City Council passed an ordinance allowing historic districts to be designated in Austin. This was decades after peer cities adopted the tool and occurred over the protests of powerful citizens who believed that only landmark-worthy buildings should be preserved. Historic district designation looks at neighborhoods holistically, recognizing the value of community stories and older, typically smaller houses. However, the local designation process is lengthy and expensive for community members and lacked clear written guidance until recently. East Austin's first two historic districts were not designated until 2019 and 2020.

2004



2006



Timeline text from the *Nothing About Us Without Us: Racial Equity Anti-Displacement Tool* report except historic districts and survey, Rainey Street rezoning text adapted from the Palm District Planning Initiative timeline  
Image credit: 84-86 Rainey Street, 1984 (Joe Freeman, Historic Resources of East Austin survey); 84-86 Rainey Street, 2020 (Google Street View); Rogers Washington Holy Cross Historic District, 2020 (City of Austin)

Policies that appear "race-neutral" can negatively impact communities of color due to decades of neglect, disinvestment, and racial and ethnic discrimination that restricted where people could live, denied them access to resources and public services, limited their ability to build wealth across generations, and ignored their voices in public processes.

## CITY-SUPPORTED ZONING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

From the 1950s to today, business leaders have led an economic development effort to expand the city's economic base with the tech industry (a primarily white workforce). These activities have not brought equal prosperity to all communities. As the explosive local economy and cultural scene draws 150 new residents per day and pushes up the cost of living, older houses and apartment buildings in East Austin's residential neighborhoods have been purchased by higher-income, often white, households and developers better able to compete in a hot real estate market. This has driven up property values and forced residents to sell homes that may have been in their families for generations.



2016

## LIMITED FOLLOW-UP TO EAST AUSTIN HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY

City Council funded a historic resource survey of East Austin following a spate of demolitions. Completed in 2016, the survey included five volumes of narrative context, recommended historic landmarks, and potential historic districts. However, chronic staffing shortages resulted in limited follow-up outreach to help local property owners understand the benefits and processes of historic designation. Few properties and districts were designated as a result of the survey.

## REACTIVE HISTORIC REVIEW FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Instead of proactively partnering with community members to identify and preserve important historic and cultural resources, most municipal preservation activities in Austin are reactive. Code-dictated processes and staff shortages mean that staff spend most of their time reviewing demolitions. To prevent demolition, a property must be individually significant as a historic landmark—a threshold more likely to be reached by architecturally grand buildings associated with wealthier, typically white people.

## Integrating equity into the plan

Working group members and staff have sought to center equity in both the process and the plan. Even policies that appear “race-neutral” can negatively impact communities of color due to decades of neglect, disinvestment, and racial and ethnic discrimination that restricted where people could live, denied them access to resources and public services, limited their ability to build wealth across generations, and ignored their voices in public processes.

For this draft, working group members used an equity evaluation framework to assess each recommendation. The framework filters the plan’s criteria for success through the lens of how recommendations may impact historically marginalized communities.

### Equity evaluation framework

Does the proposed recommendation...	Yes / No		
1. Reinforce the plan’s vision?			
If Yes, does the proposed recommendation...	- No / harms	0 Neutral	+ Yes / benefits
2. Respect community-based knowledge? Is it based on community-identified needs and input?			
3. Increase equitable access to information about historic preservation and equip people to take action? Is it clear to people without previous preservation experience?			
4. Recognize and honor the cultures, historic assets, traditions, and stories of historically marginalized communities in meaningful ways?			
5. Ground its reasoning and expected outcomes in good practices around equity, including racially disaggregated data?			
6. Balance big-picture thinking with specific, actionable, measurable items that recognize and redress historical inequities, both isolated and systemic?			
7. Improve access to preservation policies, programs, tools, and incentives for communities of color and low-income communities?			
8. Avoid creating financial or other burdens for communities of color and low-income people? If yes, are there opportunities to mitigate these impacts? Does it place responsibility on institutions to address historical disparities in historic preservation policies, programs, and tools?			
9. Advance affordability, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability for everyone, and especially for communities of color? If not, are there opportunities to do so?			
10. Engage and empower historically marginalized communities to actively participate in implementation?			

## Why preservation matters

Historic preservation recognizes and safeguards our history—and it can also play an important role in shaping the future. Regardless of designation status, older buildings are more sustainable, support affordable housing, and help small businesses and arts organizations to start and grow. And they foster a sense of place by preserving the character and culture of a particular street or neighborhood.

### Older buildings house people affordably.

- In Austin, older buildings include more than 64,000 residential units. Many of these are naturally priced below market rate, in part due to building age.



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- Areas of Austin that include historic districts have more than twice as many rental housing units that are affordable to Austinites earning 60 or 80 percent of the city's median income.<sup>1</sup>
- Affordable units in older and historic neighborhoods promote a diverse mix of residents of varying socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup>

**Older buildings enable greater density and walkability.**

- Older buildings are often built on smaller lots, allowing for increased density at a human scale. Parts of Austin that include historic districts average 80 percent greater population density and more than 2½ times the density of housing units, compared to areas that do not include historic districts.<sup>1</sup>
- Historic districts and older neighborhoods with a variety of small, mixed-age buildings have significantly higher WalkScore, Transit Score, and Bike Score ratings than newer areas.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Older buildings support small local businesses.**

- Small, non-chain businesses are more likely to thrive in areas with higher concentrations of older buildings, especially those with a diverse range of sizes. This helps to support a resilient, adaptable local economy.<sup>3</sup>
- Areas of Austin where most buildings were constructed before 1945 have more than twice the density of jobs in small businesses and more than 60 percent greater density of jobs in new businesses, compared to areas where most buildings were constructed after 1970. Majority pre-war areas also have about twice the density of women- and minority-owned business than areas with majority post-1970 construction.<sup>1</sup>

**Preservation supports cultural vitality.**

- Older buildings are a better fit for arts and cultural organizations in terms of space and price. Just under 4 percent of Austin's land area has a majority of buildings built before 1945—and contains 20 percent of the city's arts and cultural facilities.<sup>1</sup>
- Even excluding downtown, areas containing National Register historic districts average more than twice as many arts and cultural assets as other areas.<sup>1</sup>
- Areas identified as potential historic districts in East Austin make up less than 1 percent of the city's land area, but contain more than 7 percent of local arts and cultural assets.<sup>1</sup>

**Older buildings conserve natural resources.**

- It can take 35-50 years for a new "energy efficient" building to recoup the amount of embodied energy lost when an older building is demolished.
- Preserving and rehabilitating older buildings reduces the amount of landfill waste. In 2018, 145 million tons of construction and demolition debris was sent to landfills. More than 90% of that debris came from demolition.<sup>5</sup>

**Preservation strengthens and stabilizes property values.**

- Property values in historic districts support homeownership. For example, property value increases in San Antonio's historic districts outperform the local market by a sizeable margin, but homes in historic districts still retain a lower price per square foot.<sup>2</sup>
- During times of economic downturn, housing prices in local historic districts are more likely to be stable, with foreclosure rates well below city averages.<sup>2</sup>

**Preservation saves money.**

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- Keeping older windows and installing energy-efficient screens and weatherstripping offers a greater return on investment—and comparable energy savings—to installing new “energy efficient” windows, which have relatively short useful lives compared to their historic counterparts.<sup>6</sup>
- Unlike new construction, rehabilitating a building can be done in phases. This allows property owners to undertake improvement projects according to their budgets and schedules.

### **Preservation creates local jobs.**

- Between \$0.60 and \$0.70 of every dollar spent on historic preservation activities goes to jobs. In contrast, new construction spends \$0.50 of every dollar on jobs, with the remaining \$0.50 spent on materials—funds which are typically sent to big-box stores and corporate offices outside the local economy.
- On average, San Antonio gains 1,860 jobs every year from construction in historic districts.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2013, more than 79,000 jobs in Texas were created by historic preservation activities, supporting local tourism, retail, construction, and manufacturing.<sup>2</sup>

### **Preservation contributes to the local economy.**

- Preservation tax incentives generate \$4-5 in local private investment for every dollar spent at the federal level.<sup>2</sup>
- Rehab of designated historic buildings spurs the investment of around \$772 million per year in the Texas economy.<sup>2</sup>

## **Draft recommendations**

*These recommendations are being offered as a draft for Historic Landmark Commission review. Opportunities for community review and feedback will begin later in fall 2022, with more intensive outreach and engagement beginning in early 2023.*

The Preservation Plan Working Group developed the draft recommendations with targeted feedback from focus groups, the Technical Advisory Group of City staff, and a Historic Landmark Commission subcommittee. The recommendations are a starting framework for discussions about how to improve historic preservation policies, programs, and tools in Austin—and strengthen our communities at the same time.

The recommendations are grouped under 14 overarching goals, but many recommendations support more than one goal. Icons *[to be added in layout]* show different types of actions and tools: Regulatory or code changes, process changes, survey, incentives, engagement, etc.

The plan will be released in a formatted version and on the project website in fall 2022. At that time, community members, organizations and institutions, City board and commission members, and a wide range of other stakeholders will be invited to answer these questions:

- Do you support this recommendation?
- How could it be improved?
- Who could help implement it?
- Does this recommendation further equity in historic preservation? In the city as a whole?

Finally, community members will be invited to identify what’s missing from the draft recommendations.



## Draft recommendations: What we preserve

### Tell Austin's full history

#### Why is this important?

- Most early preservation advocates were white. They focused on preserving the large homes and prominent institutions of white, wealthy people.
- The historic preservation field has since expanded to value ordinary buildings and neighborhoods and to tell the stories of racially and culturally diverse communities. Today, we are still making up for lost time.

#### What's happening in Austin now?

We have a rich and complex history, but most of our designated historic buildings are associated with the people who wielded power—most often wealthier white men. Only 12% of Austin's historic landmarks and districts have known associations with historically marginalized groups: communities of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, and disabled people. In recent years, the City Council has designated more racially and culturally diverse historic resources. A 2016 survey identified many more potential landmarks and districts in East Austin. However, limited staff time means that only some follow-up can happen. Property owners who already know the benefits of historic zoning and can navigate complex, costly, and time-consuming processes are more likely to benefit from designation.

Various local stakeholders engage community members in sharing and celebrating stories that matter to them through oral histories, podcasts, and more. Meanwhile, other City departments are developing wayfinding and signage standards for streets and parks, which could inform publicly accessible storytelling and interpretation of historic places.

#### How can we achieve this goal?

##### **1. Create spaces for people to share stories and places that matter to them.**

*Create opportunities to recognize, share, and celebrate local heritage and historic places as necessities. Ensure that historic resource surveys continue to include community storytelling opportunities. Develop ongoing efforts to invite stories, share them on accessible public platforms, and use them to inform staff and Historic Landmark Commission decisions. Prioritize storytelling outreach to those who have historically been marginalized in and by public processes and who are underrepresented in designated historic resources.*

##### **2. Gather stories that tell Austin's diverse history across different cultures and languages.**

*Support and expand the Austin History Center's Community Archivist Program. Through proactive outreach and engagement, work with families and community groups to recognize stories and conserve archival materials. Coordinate across City departments and community partners in programming, training, staff support, and marketing/promotion. Integrate knowledge from oral history and community archives into the identification of historic properties. Involve local colleges and universities, school districts, and youth from the community as partners in this work.*

##### **3. Create a cultural mapping program to identify significant places, businesses, and other resources, prioritizing historically marginalized communities and neighborhoods where longtime residents face a high risk of displacement.**

*Work with Austin History Center community archivists, other City departments, local organizations and institutions, and schools to reach community members. Integrate results into historic review*

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*processes to identify potentially significant properties. With community members' consent, make results publicly accessible and readily available in multiple formats via multiple repositories.*

- 4. Develop thematic context statements to understand how local communities, groups, and building types grew and changed, prioritizing themes associated with historically marginalized communities.**

*Engage community members broadly and deeply in development of the context statements, including longtime community members who have been displaced. Use non-traditional research methods to ensure all stories are heard and elevated.*

- 5. Tell the full stories of historic places in Austin.**

*Use strategies and tools such as signage, maps and other online resources, speakers, podcasts, film series, and creative events and projects to share why older and historic places in Austin matter. Strive to tell the full stories of places and the city, including chapters that have been omitted or systematically erased, so that we may shape a more inclusive city and accurate story of Austin. Acknowledge the struggles and celebrate the triumphs and contributions of marginalized communities. Meaningfully involve communities in the interpretation of their specific histories. Work with local organizations, artists, media, tour guides, conference organizers, and others to share multifaceted information about local history and heritage with a broader audience. Ensure that costs associated with interpretation don't fall on communities.*

- 6. Research historic properties to identify and recognize untold stories, especially those associated with historically marginalized communities.**

*Recognize that older and historic places have many layers, and that stories associated with wealthier white people are more likely to have been recorded by early preservation efforts. Develop a plan to research additional stories associated with historic properties and, where they are found, amend historic nominations to reflect a more complex history.*

- 7. Document places that have been lost.**

*In conjunction with proactive preservation strategies, recognize the memories, stories, and values associated with places that no longer exist. Create a clear, publicly accessible way to document these places and share stories associated with them. Conduct focused outreach to African American and Mexican American communities with East Austin roots who have been impacted by disinvestment and demolition. Involve AISD and youth from the community as partners in this work.*

- 8. Reach out to owners of potential historic landmarks and historic districts, particularly those associated with historically marginalized communities.**

*Use survey data, context statements, and cultural mapping to assess and prioritize potential historic properties. Historic designation requires time, familiarity with complex City processes, and funds; communities of color and people with lower incomes have been functionally excluded from the process. Conduct proactive engagement in areas identified as potential historic districts and to potential historic landmarks, prioritizing areas occupied by historically marginalized communities and property owners in areas at high risk of displacement. Offer tailored workshops to community members interested in compiling district applications.*

## **Recognize cultural heritage**

Why is this important?

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- Cultural heritage includes the traditions, knowledge, stories, and skills that help define and connect communities, groups, and individuals. It is sometimes called living heritage.
- Legacy businesses, murals, and other types of cultural heritage add meaning and a sense of belonging to places. This is especially important in quickly changing cities like Austin.
- Traditional preservation tools may support cultural heritage, but not always. For example, surveys focused on architecture may not reflect the most important stories of a place and community.

What's happening in Austin now?

Cultural heritage is currently recognized in a few ways in Austin. Locally designated cultural heritage resources include the Mexican American Heritage Corridor on 5<sup>th</sup> Street and a Covid-19 legacy business grant program for 20+ year-old restaurants, arts, and entertainment businesses. The State of Texas also runs a cultural district program largely focused on economic benefits, with two districts in Austin.

How can we achieve this goal?

**9. Strongly support iconic longstanding legacy businesses that contribute to Austin's unique character and heritage.**

*Economic Development Department activities like the Legacy Business Relief Grant offer a strong baseline. Ensure that legacy businesses benefit from existing and new programs by providing coordinated marketing/promotion, technical assistance, and streamlined regulation for a wide variety of legacy businesses; offering dedicated need-based funding and tax relief; and creating a "legacy business" points category for funding opportunities. Conduct focused outreach to businesses owned by people of color about opportunities and work with them and other stakeholders to identify gaps.*

**10. Create a way to designate exterior murals for historic or cultural significance, with incentives for property owners.**

*Consider a more recent age threshold and balance maintenance requirements against traditional concepts of material integrity. Allow a mural to be designated without the entire building being required to have significance. Conduct proactive identification, community engagement, and owner outreach to designate significant murals.*

**11. Consider how various district designations could support Austin's cultural heritage.**

*Building on current work in the Economic Development Department, explore models for district programs that aim to preserve cultural heritage, prevent displacement, and further local control for communities that have historically been disadvantaged by and underrepresented in City policies. Work closely with community stakeholders to determine how such a program could be structured and funded to meet multiple goals, including preservation of cultural heritage such as community traditions, languages, and traditional foodways.*

**12. Develop consistent definitions and criteria around intangible cultural heritage to inform and guide local programs and policies.**

*Clearly define legacy businesses and other cultural heritage.*

**13. Develop an addendum for landscape management to the City of Austin Historic Design Standards.**

**Preserve archaeological resources**

Why is this important?

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- Archaeological sites provide a unique window into local history. From Native American and Indigenous communities to more recent urban history, archaeology helps explain how a community has developed.
- In a 2016 review of 69 local governments, less than 1/3 had archaeologists on staff. The remainder relied on partnerships or reports developed for permit review.
- Both federal and state laws address archaeological resources. However, with the exception of cemeteries, neither covers private development.

What's happening in Austin now?

Archaeology is one of our five criteria for potential historic landmarks. However, City staff do not have access to archaeological expertise to evaluate potentially significant properties or do proactive outreach and planning. Because of this, the archaeology criterion is rarely used.

Apart from protection of the few archaeological sites designated as historic landmarks, the Land Development Code has no predevelopment review process to assess archaeological potential or require data recovery if significant sites will be disturbed.

How can we achieve this goal?

**14. Make professional archaeological expertise readily available to City staff.**

*Create a City Archaeologist position or have an archaeologist on retainer and create a rotation list and budget for archaeological services to ensure professional expertise is available for oversight of or advisement on ground-disturbing work on public land, at historic properties with archaeological significance, and in other private development as appropriate. Develop criteria, liability guidelines, and a review process for staff and Commission review of grant-funded archaeological projects.*

**15. Ensure significant archaeological resources are adequately recognized in planning for City projects.**

*Comply with the Antiquities Code of Texas for ground-disturbing projects on public land. Require archaeological assessments prior to sale of City-owned land.*

**16. Explore incorporating archaeological review requirements into the predevelopment review process for large projects in areas with known or high probability for archaeological sites.**

*Archaeological resources are unrecoverable once lost. Evaluate the extent to which areas with known or likely archaeological sites are threatened by development. Consider code changes to require targeted review of private development, with thresholds based on archaeological potential and project size. Pair any additional oversight with robust outreach and education.*

**Stabilize communities**

Why is this important?

- People add essential meaning to places. Longtime residents, seniors, and renters whose stories are interwoven with their homes are at increasing risk of displacement.
- Studies across the United States have shown that properties in historic districts appreciate faster than similar properties outside districts. In Austin's superheated market, though, historic district designation can be a near-term tool to stabilize property values.
- Older houses that are not designated as historic play an even bigger role in maintaining affordability and preventing displacement. Older houses provide relatively affordable housing without public subsidies. Fixing them up can be less expensive than building new housing units.

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- Accessory dwelling units (ADUs) add housing that can provide income for property owners, helping them stay in their homes, and create units that are more affordable than primary houses.

What's happening in Austin now?

Local housing values have soared in recent years, creating an affordability crisis for low- and moderate-income households. City programs fund home repairs, accessibility improvements, weatherization, and energy efficiency projects for families in need, but their reach has been limited.

Both the Mayor's Anti-Displacement Task Force and the People's Plan recommended expanding the use of historic districts to preserve Austin's historically Black and Brown communities, prioritizing communities at high risk of displacement. In July 2022, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) convened a Technical Assistance Panel around safeguarding older and historic housing while supporting affordability and preventing displacement; its recommendations will be considered in discussions about this plan.

How can we achieve this goal?

**17. Identify ways that flexible zoning could support historic preservation goals, such as through the proposed Preservation Incentive.**

*Focusing on tools that meet preservation and other community goals, support the retention of older and historic buildings, provision of affordable housing, and anti-displacement community preservation.*

**18. Encourage accessory dwelling units (ADUs) as a way to provide more affordable housing while stewarding neighborhood character.**

*Encourage property owners and developers to construct ADUs by providing technical support and pre-approved plans, including some plans that meet the Historic Design Standards. For ADUs that provide affordable rental housing to low-income households, help property owners finance construction and explore how to offset increased property taxes.*

**19. Streamline and expedite the development review process for projects that support the retention of historic-age properties.**

*Incentivize retaining older buildings through process changes, particularly shorter development review timelines. In close collaboration with City staff from affected departments and stakeholders, identify process barriers and consider changes that could make retaining older buildings a more attractive option. Reduce relocation permit application fees to encourage a more environmentally friendly choice than demolition.*

**20. Advocate for an income-based property tax circuit breaker**

*Recognize the value that longtime residents contribute to stable neighborhoods and vibrant communities. This incentive would need to be enabled at the state level, then adopted as a local tool. Work with affordable housing advocates and policy organizations to advocate for this anti-displacement measure for all low- and moderate-income property owners, and especially seniors.*

**21. Provide resources for heirs' property owners and low-income seniors.**

*Working with City, institutional, and community partners, as well as related professional organizations, recognize the challenges faced by those inheriting property, as well as low-income seniors. Identify tools and convene partners to provide training and other resources (e.g., estate planning/wills and assistance with tax liens).*



**22. Explore a legacy inheritance incentive to support low- and moderate-income descendants who want to stay in an inherited property.**

*To help meet community preservation and anti-displacement goals, explore what a potential legacy inheritance incentive could look like. Bring together affected families and experts to assess needs and effective solutions. This incentive could be paired with technical assistance around heirs' property.*

**23. Educate historic property owners about resources that can help them remain in and improve their buildings.**

*In coordination with other City departments and agencies, reach out to historic property owners about programs that help prevent displacement and make essential improvements. These include accessory dwelling units (ADUs), GO REPAIR! grants, Architectural Barrier Removal, Home Rehabilitation Loans, and Austin Energy incentives aimed at weatherizing properties and reducing energy use. Most, though not all, of these programs are income restricted.*

**24. Educate historic property owners about resources that support affordable rental housing.**

*Reach out to owners and managers of historic rental properties about programs such as Rental Housing Development Assistance (RHDA), which funds maintenance and rehabilitation for affordable units. Target longtime property owners with lower debt service, leveraging the ability of older houses and long-term owners to provide affordable rental housing.*

**25. Direct some affordable housing funding towards historic properties.**

*Layer affordable housing resources, historic designation, and preservation incentives to achieve multiple public goals. Work with the Austin Housing Finance Corporation and Travis County Housing Finance Corporation early in the resource allocation process to ensure that their funding does not negatively impact eligible or designated historic resources.*

**26. Explore a tiered rehabilitation tax abatement for non-designated historic-age properties.**

*Develop a pilot incentive at the City level that meets affordability and sustainability goals by encouraging property owners to reinvest in older buildings, rather than replacing them with more expensive newer buildings. This could be structured similarly to the 10% federal rehabilitation tax credit (offered through 2017), a smaller credit available to older buildings without historic designation and reevaluated in 10-15 years.*

**27. Examine whether existing and proposed incentive programs could incorporate a preference policy benefitting households with ties to Austin, both to help prevent displacement from homes, neighborhoods, and the city and to help people return to Austin.**

## **Support environmental sustainability**

### Why is this important?

- The greenest building is typically one that's already built. It can take 35-50 years for a new "energy efficient" building to recoup the amount of embodied energy lost when an older building is demolished.
- Preserving and rehabilitating older buildings reduces the amount of landfill waste. In 2018, 145 million tons of construction and demolition debris was sent to U.S. landfills. More than 90% of that debris came from demolition.
- Reducing demolitions helps avoid negative public health impacts, preserve affordable housing, and create jobs.

What's happening in Austin now?

The City has set a goal of reducing the amount of trash sent to landfills by 90% by the year 2040. To help meet it, the Climate Equity Plan recommends reducing waste from construction and demolition projects. Currently, less than half of Austin's waste is diverted from landfills. When a commercial or multifamily building is demolished, at least 50% of construction debris must be re used or recycled. There are no requirements for single-family houses.

Sometimes property owners may want to relocate a building instead of demolish it. However, relocating buildings within Austin is currently difficult. Owners must obtain a permit to move the building off the property, and another to place it on the new lot in a way that meets setback constraints and tree regulations. This permitting process can be very lengthy—and costly. Because of this, most relocated houses end up outside Austin.

How can we achieve this goal?

**28. Recognize the significant external costs associated with demolition by adopting policies and practices that incentivize alternatives.**

*Evaluate and adopt policies and practices that incentivize alternatives to demolition. Increase review fees to offset reduced or eliminated fees for historic preservation efforts.*

**29. Explore how to make it easier to relocate buildings within Austin.**

*Work with other City departments and stakeholders to explore how barriers to local relocation might be reduced or removed when preserving a building in place is not feasible.*

**30. Encourage property owners to retain older buildings by allowing approved demolition permits to be converted to relocation permits.**

*Support retention of older buildings and encourage sustainability by streamlining the process to change approved demolition permits to relocation permits. Allow previously paid demolition permit application fees and approved processes to be applied to remodel or relocation permit applications for owners who decide to retain an older building.*

**31. Encourage deconstruction and materials salvage when preservation in place and relocation are not feasible.**

*In line with Austin's goal of zero waste by 2040, explore and adopt policies, programs, and incentives that incentivize or require deconstruction and materials salvage in light of environmental and health impacts, the loss of cultural heritage, and increased landfill waste. Create a supply of historic-age quality building materials.*

## **Draft recommendations: Who preserves**

### **Engage and empower communities**

Why is this important?

- Preservation successes are created and sustained by community members, property owners, business owners, advocacy organizations, and allied groups. Engaging a diverse range of community members is essential.
- Effective outreach, education, and engagement involves creative partnerships. These partnerships invite people to share, celebrate, and preserve community stories and built heritage.



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What's happening in Austin now?

Most people find out about preservation projects through mailed notices of public hearings. The notices are not always easy to understand and arrive after a property owner has already made major decisions. The Historic Preservation Office also provides online information and limited outreach about historic preservation processes—one result of a relatively small staff tasked with time-consuming code requirements.

Other City departments do broader and deeper engagement around community heritage, including proactive outreach, education, and engagement activities where participants help make decisions and shape policies.

A history of broken promises and discrimination means that the City of Austin is not trusted by all community members. It is important to work with trusted partners to share information and resources and engage new groups.

How can we achieve this goal?

**32. Make it easier to participate in public decision-making.**

*Identify and remove barriers to participation in public processes. Streamline and structure public meetings to make participation easier. Hold meetings in neighborhoods, on public transit lines, and at a variety of times outside of the typical Monday to Friday 9 a.m.-5 p.m. timeframe; provide food and childcare. Offer online participation options, as well as other ways for those who are unfamiliar with public process and/or unavailable during typical meeting times to participate. Increase awareness about opportunities to serve on the Historic Landmark Commission, particularly in outreach to historically marginalized communities, and maintain a list of interested candidates.*

**33. Help people access knowledge and resources and preserve community stories.**

*Offer classes, toolkits, and “train the trainer” events about historic preservation and designation, especially in older neighborhoods: what qualifies, how the process works, and how preservation benefits Austin. Consider an ongoing community ambassador program with paid participants who can facilitate storytelling events, collect oral histories, and provide preservation resources to neighbors, particularly in historically marginalized communities. Publicize opportunities to share archival material about community heritage with the Austin History Center and other repositories. Consider working across City divisions and/or departments on a citizen planner training.*

**34. Improve historic designation and historic review processes to be more clear, streamlined, and transparent.**

*Work with community members, including people with a range of experience levels navigating local historic processes, to improve processes for and communication around historic designation and historic review. Leverage resources and expertise from the Equity Office and Office of Innovation.*

**35. Ensure that materials are easy to understand.**

*Use language that is accessible to people without formal preservation training in outreach materials, historic designation application guides and forms, and public notices and signs. Provide resources in multiple languages and publicize the City's commitment to offer interpretation at community meetings.*

**36. Develop accessible materials about historic preservation, community heritage, incentives, archaeology, and City historic designation and review processes; provide online and hard copy versions.**

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*Ensure that the Historic Preservation Office website is clear and accessible, as well as existing and new print materials. Use social media to reach new and existing audiences, including paid boosts and partner collaborations to increase effectiveness. Develop an array of preservation resources with clear terminology, compelling graphics, and easy-to-understand examples.*

**37. Share preservation success stories while being up-front about potential costs and tradeoffs.**

*Use empirical research and quantitative analysis to demonstrate successful projects in built and cultural heritage. Use case studies on websites, handouts, presentations, videos, tours, etc. Present information about potential tradeoffs while actively developing mitigation strategies. Acknowledge how historic inequities have led to fewer success stories in some communities to make the case for more equitable preservation policies and practices.*

**38. Develop educational programming for youth.**

*Work with local school districts, community organizations and institutions, and universities and colleges on a hyperlocal history curriculum and STEM-related programming at the intersection of sustainability, resilience, and preservation. Consider a heritage- and preservation-focused summer camp with other City departments and partner organizations.*

**39. Develop programs that connect the next generation of Austinites with legacy businesses, local heritage, and economic opportunities.**

*Collaborate with school districts and colleges to explore potential job placement and mentorship programs (paid) with legacy businesses, expansion of ACC's Skilled Trades program to include preservation skills, internships with the Historic Preservation Office, and other initiatives.*

**40. Develop education and outreach programs around archaeology**

*Educate the public about significant archaeological sites and what they reveal about the prehistoric and historic communities that have called Austin home. Develop an archaeological training program for City departments that undertake infrastructure and construction work. Assist private developers in identifying and avoiding archaeological remains.*

**41. Prioritize community engagement in surveys.**

*Revise survey timelines and scopes of work to allow broader and deeper outreach, inclusion of oral histories, and community review of draft surveys. For neighborhoods that have experienced significant displacement, develop ways to reach longtime residents who no longer live in the area.*

**42. Create and maintain a publicly accessible, regularly updated online map with survey recommendations**

*Use the Property Profile tool if possible. Notate the map with corrections submitted by community members on an ongoing basis. Include recent City-sponsored and community surveys that have been reviewed by staff and the Historic Landmark Commission.*

## **Support people doing the work**

### Why is this important?

- Carpenters and other craftspeople who do specialized work on provide critical expertise for historic property owners.
- The Historic Landmark Commission and Historic Preservation Office staff make key decisions about older and historic properties. Regular training and quality resources help them to be clear, consistent, and up to date on preservation good practices.

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What's happening in Austin now?

City board and commission members are appointed by City Council and the mayor. They volunteer their time for public hearings and additional committee meetings. Childcare is not provided.

Newly appointed Historic Landmark Commission members receive a binder with background materials. In the recent past, Historic Landmark Commission trainings have occurred approximately every two years.

How can we achieve this goal?

**43. Highlight craftspeople who work on historic buildings, skills demonstrations, and career pathways**

*Through public events, workshops, and media (like ATXN and Austin Public), increase community awareness of local craftspeople, career pathways, and resources available for historic property stewardship.*

**44. Ensure that Historic Landmark Commission members and community ambassadors have access to regular trainings and helpful resources.**

*Orient new commissioners and community ambassadors; provide required annual trainings, including equity training. Update training materials periodically.*

**45. Provide regular training and professional development opportunities for Historic Preservation Office staff.**

**46. Institute fair compensation for City board and commission members.**

*The working group recommends this citywide policy change, which would reduce participation barriers for lower-income residents.*

**47. Provide free childcare for City board and commission members.**

*The working group recommends this citywide practice, which would reduce participation barriers for caregivers.*

**Engage new partners**

Why is this important?

- Broadening preservation's reach and benefits to more people increases equitable preservation activity.
- Diverse organizations, community institutions, City departments, and City boards and commissions have overlapping interests in remembering and retaining local stories and places.
- To be effective, preservation initiatives must include this broad group of partners in creative collaborations.

What's happening in Austin now?

Historically, preservation efforts have involved people who own property, are more likely to be white, and earn higher incomes than the average Austinite. This applies to advocates, commissioners, and employees. And it is the case in many or most places across the U.S.

In general, community members, neighborhood associations, and other stakeholders are engaged project by project, either by City staff or their own initiative. Coordination between City departments

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generally happens on an *ad hoc* basis. Departments whose work regularly overlaps with preservation meet monthly.

How can we achieve this goal?

**48. Define preservation audiences broadly, recognizing that places and stories are important to a broad range of people.**

*Develop strategies to reach a more diverse group, including but not limited to renters, businesses, communities that have historically been adversely impacted by public policies, groups that have been marginalized and underrepresented in public decision-making and historic resources, religious groups, schools, developers, real estate agents, young people, elders, longtime residents (including people displaced from Austin), the media, tourists, and policymakers. Use stakeholder input and other data to guide outreach and engagement strategies. Allocate funding for outreach and engagement.*

**49. Raise awareness of preservation's benefits among community members, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.**

*Proactively share why Austin's older and historic places matter, as well as the economic, environmental, and social benefits of rehabilitation and heritage tourism. Buildings and intangible cultural heritage create a shared sense of belonging, enhance quality of life, provide affordable housing options, boost local small businesses, support climate change readiness and the Zero Waste initiative, and further sound planning principles. Expand Austinites' definition of historic preservation beyond its traditional roles and help people understand how it benefits all generations, diverse communities, and the city as a whole.*

**50. Work with trusted partners in the community and other City departments to conduct public outreach and engagement.**

*Collaborate to identify shared priorities and goals, better understand community needs, engage community members, offer information, and invite meaningful participation. Recognize that historic marginalization of and harm to some communities by the City may make outreach and engagement difficult, but also essential. Hire community members as paid ambassadors to increase capacity and conduct effective outreach.*

**51. Meet people where they are.**

*Provide outreach and educational materials where people live and visit: door hangers, flyers and handouts at community spaces and informal gathering spots, tabling at events, presentations at community meetings, and more. Provide content and cross-postings for partner websites, newsletters, and social media. Integrate more information on historic properties into the City's Property Profile map and create resource packets for Austin History Center and other library patrons who may be interested in connecting historic research to local places.*

**52. Recommend that Council appoint Commission members who reflect their districts' racial, ethnic, age, and income diversity.**

*Provide demographic information in the Historic Landmark Commission's annual report and to Council members when a vacancy opens.*

**53. Update the recommendations for whom Council may appoint to the Historic Landmark Commission.**

*Recommend that at least six Commission members represent different allied professions or academic areas such as archaeology, architecture, landscape architecture, architectural history, historic*

*preservation, history, anthropology, law, real estate, and structural engineering. Also recognize the value and necessity of including historic property owners and community members.*

**54. Train City staff to be ambassadors for historic preservation.**

*Work with related departments to identify overlaps with historic preservation and educate staff on benefits and incentives. For example, staff at the Austin History Center Reading Room, the Carver Genealogy Center, and other library branches could share information about historic places along with research tips, while staff from Austin Resource Recovery, Austin Energy's Green Building Program, the Office of Sustainability, and the Development Services Department could attest to the sustainability of retaining rather than demolishing buildings.*

**55. Provide periodic opportunities for cross-training among Development Services Department, Austin Code, Austin Resource Recovery, Office of Sustainability, housing finance corporations (Austin and Travis County), and Historic Preservation Office staff.**

*Ensure staff across departments are familiar with each others' processes and resources, encouraging collaborative problem-solving. Training topics should include performance-based applications of code requirements, exemptions for historic properties in the International Building Code and International Existing Building Code, archaeological regulations, special requirements like demolition by neglect, and discussion of inequities in past City practices and policies. Explore naming a few staff in other departments as specialist points of contact with more in-depth preservation training.*

## **Draft recommendations: How we preserve**

### **Proactively identify important places**

#### Why is this important?

- Historic resource surveys identify potentially significant older buildings and areas. Surveys do not automatically lead to historic designation, but some cities use them to inform outreach and support proactive designation.
- Large-scale intensive surveys are time-consuming and expensive. Windshield surveys—which collect less information over a larger area—can help focus more detailed surveys.
- Not all important places are architecturally significant. Community-based approaches can share important stories and places that might not be identified by a historic resource survey.

#### What's happening in Austin now?

Recent surveys have identified many potential historic landmarks and historic districts. Yet much of Austin has not been surveyed. In these areas, properties are evaluated for historic significance only after the owner has decided to demolish or substantially change their building.

The City's small preservation staff does not have dedicated time for follow-up engagement or mapping that could help community members better understand and use survey information.

#### How can we achieve this goal?

**56. Use community engagement, thematic context statements, and other means to identify culturally significant properties.**

*Cross-reference community-sourced lists and obituaries and develop culturally focused context statements to identify significant people, groups, events, and associated properties.*

**57. Complete a citywide windshield survey.**

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*Provide broad data to inform staff evaluations and prioritize areas for more intensive surveys. This could be phase 2 of the historic building scan (with review of data from phase 1 for accuracy) or a different model.*

**58. Survey historic-age buildings and areas that have not yet been included in a historic resource survey.**

*Develop a prioritized plan for surveys using data from the East Austin Historic Resources Survey, historic building scan, building and demolition permits, and areas vulnerable to gentrification and displacement; and allocate funding for surveys on an annual basis.*

**59. Update existing surveys every 10 years with new historic-age buildings and major changes to historic property eligibility.**

*Ensure that community members are invited to participate in updates and share knowledge.*

**60. Re-evaluate existing survey data to reflect any changes in designation criteria, integrity requirements, and/or age thresholds.**

**Follow good designation practices**

Why is this important?

- The criteria for designating places as historic determine what places qualify for protection. Designation criteria typically fall under four categories from the National Register of Historic Places: events, people, design/construction, and potential to yield information. Most cities break up these large categories into more specific designation criteria.
- Historic places must also retain historic integrity, meaning that they can visually convey the reasons they are important. Because preservationists historically treated architecture as the most important element, “integrity” came to mean that a building had not changed physically.
- This narrow focus on architectural integrity makes it harder to designate places historically occupied by African Americans, Mexican Americans, and other communities of color. Whether due to structural disinvestment or other racist causes, their neighborhoods saw significantly deferred maintenance. Some buildings were repaired with less expensive materials like asbestos siding or aluminum-sash windows. Over time, buildings were added to or changed in ways that that traditional preservationists may consider incompatible with historic designation.

What’s happening in Austin now?

Austin has five criteria for historic significance: far fewer than most peer cities. Historic landmarks must meet at least two criteria. Most other cities use the same designation criteria for both historic landmarks and districts. Here, potential districts are not required to meet historic significance criteria. In practice, though, our eight historic districts have important histories documented in the district applications.

Historic districts can be geographically contiguous, recognizing the development of one area, or thematic, recognizing resources that speak to an important theme across multiple neighborhoods. Historic districts in Austin currently are required to be contiguous, with no “donut holes.”

Historic preservation is a public goal established by various ordinances and plans, but property owners seeking historic designation are still required to pay high application fees compared to peer cities.

How can we achieve this goal?



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**61. Expand the number of historic designation criteria.**

*Un-group concepts in current criteria; ensure all criteria are easy to understand. Consider adding criteria to more clearly recognize the diverse reasons that resources are significant, especially criteria that acknowledge cultural and community significance.*

**62. Reconsider the number of designation criteria that a property must meet for designation.**

*In concert with expanded historic designation criteria, consider whether a property should meet a single or multiple criteria to be designated as historic.*

**63. Reframe integrity requirements for historic designation.**

*Recognize the value of association and feeling in recognizing historic properties, particularly those with cultural and community significance. De-emphasize integrity of materials and craftsmanship for properties that are significant for reasons other than architecture.*

**64. Lower or remove age threshold for historic designation.**

*The requirement that historic properties be at least 50 years old can limit communities' ability to preserve places they value and result in the loss of living knowledge of what makes a place important. It also has implications for integrity when a place changes with ongoing use. Accompany changes in the age threshold with increased public education about what makes places "historic."*

**65. Reduce cost barriers to historic landmark and historic district applications.**

*Recognizing preservation as a public good that the City seeks to encourage, remove a barrier to historic designation by eliminating fees for historic designation applications. Allocate departmental budget to cover associated City fees.*

**66. Create a new preservation tax abatement tied to designation of historic districts and historic landmarks.**

*Reinforce both displacement prevention and preservation goals by abating City property taxes for newly designated historic landmarks and historic districts. Similar to San Antonio, the abatement could last for 10 years, with one 5-year extension if the property remains in the same ownership and additional 5-year extensions if the same owner or tenants meet income qualifications.*

**67. Allow non-contiguous historic districts and multiple property designations.**

*Recognize that many resources with significant community, cultural, and architectural themes are not concentrated in one geographic area. Clearly distinguish between the goals of contiguous and non-contiguous designation, and ensure that new provisions to implement non-contiguous historic districts and multiple property designations do not weaken the authority for creation of contiguous historic districts.*

**68. Use existing tools in code to create highest priority historic districts.**

*Under City code, the Historic Landmark Commission or City Council can initiate historic landmarks and historic districts. Supermajority approval is needed at the Commission and Council levels if 51% of property owners by number or land area have not submitted ballots in support of the district designation.*

**69. Require that potential historic districts meet at least one historic designation criterion for significance to be designated.**

*Functionally, the Historic Landmark Commission, City Council, and the community expect historic districts to have significance. However, this is not clearly stated, and the current expectation should*



*be formalized in code for the sake of transparency. The expanded criteria for historic designation should apply.*

**70. Allow properties in historic districts to be designated as historic landmarks based on architectural significance.**

*Historic landmarks confer different expectations, requirements, and benefits than contributing properties in historic districts. Recognizing that not everyone has equal access to historic designation information or processes, timing of historic district designation should not be a factor in determining whether a property can be designated as a historic landmark.*

**71. Explore interior designation of publicly accessible spaces, including incentives for property owners.**

*Publicly accessible spaces may include private uses that depend on public patronage, such as lobbies, restaurants, or theaters. Consider whether to allow designation of historically significant interiors without companion exterior designation of the building. Recommend requiring owner consent for designation.*

**72. Require supermajorities of Historic Landmark Commission and Council members to remove historic zoning.**

*Recognizing historic resources as lasting community assets, require a supermajority of votes at the commission and Council to remove historic zoning from a property or district.*

**73. Advocate to reverse state policies with disparate requirements for historic zoning.**

*Realign zoning requirements for historic landmarks and historic districts with other zoning types in state law. Reinstate the requirement for supermajority support at City Council for historic district valid petitions (when the owners of 20% or more of the land area object to the change), as for all other zoning types, rather than for a single owner's objection. For historic landmark zoning, remove the requirement for supermajority support at the Historic Landmark Commission or land use commission level, retaining it at City Council. Remove the prohibition on designation of religious-owned properties without owner consent, retaining the valid petition requirements common to all other zoning types.*

**74. Remove barriers to historic designation of City-owned property.**

*In partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department, pursue a pilot program to designate an entire park as a historic district. Partner with the Public Works Department to designate bridges and other historic infrastructure features.*

**75. Retain a designation criterion that recognizes significant landscapes.**

*When expanding designation criteria, maintain at least one criterion that recognizes significant cultural, historic, and natural landscapes.*

**76. Study the benefits and challenges of creating different designation levels for historic buildings.**

*Using England's Grade I, II\*, and II categories as a model, explore different levels of review and incentives for historic landmarks and buildings in historic districts.*

## **Support stewardship of community assets**

Why is this important?

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- There are many ways to support stewards of older and historic properties in designating, maintaining, and improving their buildings. Unlike community assets owned by public agencies—parks, schools, archives, and more—stewards of historic homes and businesses are usually private property owners.
- Preservation tools and incentives exist in many forms at all levels: local, state, and federal.
- Preservation tools can support other goals as well. For example, rehabilitating older buildings powerfully spurs local economic activity. Labor-intensive renovations mean that more money goes to craftsmen than materials. And the economic activity and tax revenue generated by historic renovations means that historic tax incentives help pay for themselves.

What's happening in Austin now?

Tax abatements are available for owners who rehabilitate contributing properties in historic districts. The program reduces the City property tax owed on the added value of a property, with duration depending on location and use. To date, the historic district tax abatement has been lightly used. Owners of historic landmarks receive an annual partial tax exemption from City, County, and AISD property taxes. Properties must meet City maintenance standards.

More analysis is needed on the equity aspects of existing incentives. Every household's situation is different, but Austin's landmarks are generally located in areas with higher median household incomes—53% higher than the city as a whole. Landmarks also have higher average and median assessed property values than historic districts and other parts of Austin.

**Note:** The draft recommendations suggest exploration of any major changes—not the direct, immediate changes themselves. The plan offers signposts for involved community processes and in-depth analysis.

How can we achieve this goal?

**77. Ensure all property owners have information about rehabilitation and preservation options, particularly for historic and historic-age buildings.**

*Coordinate with City-sponsored community navigator programs to share information about the benefits of retaining older buildings and resources for maintaining, rehabilitating, and activating buildings. Provide information about preservation options and organizations that can assist property owners via departmental websites and historic case managers. Explore other potential partnerships for sharing information and resources with community members. Sponsor hands-on workshops to help property owners build maintenance and repair skills.*

**78. Proactively communicate about historic review processes with property owners, architects, developers, and contractors.**

**79. Train real estate agents, architects, and contractors who work with older and historic buildings to make sure they're knowledgeable about historic preservation processes and incentives.**

*Provide information and regular training opportunities to professionals who act as intermediaries with property owners.*

**80. Identify milestones in major processes such as property sales and development decisions, determine what information is needed at which point, and figure out how to get it to people.**

*Work with a variety of stakeholders such as property owners, real estate agents, architects, contractors, developers, and City staff to develop ways that help ensure prospective buyers and property owners have the information they need. This is particularly important for historic properties and properties that have been determined eligible for historic designation.*

**81. Make the rehabilitation tax abatement more effective via multi-pronged substantial improvements and expand it to historic landmarks.**

*Austin's historic tax incentive should encourage continued investment and have demonstrable benefits for all historic property owners. Improve the existing rehabilitation tax abatement by freezing the pre-rehabilitation property value for the duration of the abatement and lowering the cost threshold to allow smaller projects to receive the incentive. Allow applications at project completion if the work was previously approved, and consider a look-back period for recently completed projects in new districts that meet the Historic Design Standards. Expand the abatement to other taxing entities, providing information about the economic impact of rehabilitation projects.*

**82. Actively explore how a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program could successfully support preservation of smaller-scale downtown buildings, commercial corridors, and historic districts in areas targeted for higher density.**

*Conduct market and equity analyses to assess the feasibility of this important tool in protecting historic properties while allowing increased height and density in other priority areas. Identify receiving areas appropriate for denser development without impacts to vulnerable neighborhoods. Implement the TDR program if analysis demonstrates that it would be effective.*

**83. Evaluate the benefits and equity aspects of the historic landmark tax exemption in comparison with the proposed abatement and Transfer of Development Rights programs.**

*During design of the designation and rehabilitation abatement and Transfer of Development Rights programs, complete a financial analysis in comparison with the existing landmark tax exemption to ensure the programs continue to incentivize designation and maintenance of significant properties. Continue the existing landmark tax exemption for previously designated historic landmarks until sale or transfer of the property. If the exemption program is scaled back, direct recaptured City revenue to implementation of this plan, and particularly to recommendations that actively increase equity in historic preservation.*

**84. Make existing incentives available to income-producing and nonprofit-owned properties in locally designated historic districts.**

*Work with the Texas Historical Commission to designate existing historic districts as certified local historic districts as defined by the National Park Service. This designation would allow income-generating properties to use federal historic tax credits to offset the costs of rehabilitation projects, and both income-generating and nonprofit-owned properties to use state historic tax credits. No additional requirements would be involved.*

**85. Advocate for a state homeowner rehabilitation tax credit.**

*Build on the success of the Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, which supports rehabilitations of income-producing and nonprofit-owned historic properties. Work with the Texas Historical Commission, Preservation Texas, and other cities to advocate for a state-level historic tax credit benefitting historically designated homestead properties.*

**86. Raise awareness about the historic tax abatement programs and other preservation incentives.**

*Conduct targeted outreach to property owners in existing and potential historic districts about the abatement programs. Better integrate the rehabilitation abatement application with the historic review process. Promote the state historic tax credit program for income-producing and nonprofit-owned historic properties.*

**87. Create a clear, transparent, fair process for property owners to claim economic hardship.**

*Create an economic hardship provision in code. Provide financial and technical resources to property owners facing economic hardship in maintaining their properties. Leverage partnerships to help find new stewards if the owners wish to sell.*

**88. Reduce cost barriers associated with historic review processes for historic landmarks and districts.**

*Follow best practices in other cities and recognize preservation as a public good. Allocate departmental budget or a portion of demolition fees to subsidize part of or all historic review fees for designated properties. A tiered fee system based on project size may be considered.*

**89. Create a preservation resource center.**

*Provide examples of approved projects. This resource will help applicants and can give owners of prospective landmarks and in potential historic districts ideas about possible projects. Make information available online and as easily accessible hard copies (e.g., in branch libraries and City rec centers).*

**90. Host historic preservation trade fairs.**

*Host periodic trade fairs to bring together historic property stewards and experts in preservation trades. Invite potential employers with job/apprenticeship opportunities to attend; conduct focused outreach to communities of color, teenagers, and young adults.*

## **Be strategic with review**

### Why is this important?

- Historic resources can be designated at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Local designation offers the strongest protection by requiring approval of exterior changes to historic buildings. Small changes can be approved administratively by staff; historic preservation commissions review larger and/or more visible changes.
- Properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service in cooperation with state governments. Because listing is honorary, very few cities review National Register properties.
- Design review is the process for managing change to historic properties—our built community heritage. At its best, design review is a collaborative effort between property owners, architects, City preservation staff, and the Historic Landmark Commission.

### What's happening in Austin now?

Austin differs from comparable cities in a few ways. Unlike most cities, we review all exterior changes to all properties more than 45 years old, creating a high-volume workload with limited results: only \_\_% *[staff to fill in]* of these reviews result in recommended designations. Our preservation program also does not regulate noncontributing properties in historic districts except for stand-alone, ground-up new construction.

Finally, Austin stands nearly alone in requiring properties in National Register districts to go through a review process for proposed exterior changes, though property owners do not have to follow recommendations. The State of Texas has advised against requiring this type of local review, since no zoning change is involved in National Register listing.

Austin's historic preservation program has been under-resourced in terms of staff for decades and still has limited capacity. A 2017 audit noted we had one of the lowest staffing levels for historic

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preservation among comparable cities. Most staff time is spent on code-mandated permit review and case management. This leaves little opportunity for the proactive designation outreach, community engagement, educational activities, and inspections of approved projects that might lead to better preservation outcomes in the long run. The implementation of most recommendations in this plan is not feasible at current staffing levels.

How can we achieve this goal?

**91. Review changes to noncontributing properties in locally designated historic districts to ensure properties do not become less compatible.**

*Use more flexible standards to review changes to noncontributing properties, focusing on building scale and massing instead of material changes or minor alteration; prioritize administrative approval by Historic Preservation Office staff.*

**92. Stop advisory review of changes to privately owned properties in National Register districts.**

*Follow state and national best practices and strategically use limited staff time by treating National Register district properties like other 45+ year-old buildings in terms of code-required review for landmark eligibility. Encourage property owners in National Register districts to consult with staff and neighborhood associations on project compatibility and to create locally designated historic districts. Establish a staff-level advisory review process for City-owned properties listed in the National Register.*

**93. Retain a demolition or relocation delay of up to 180 days for contributing properties in National Register districts.**

*Include more applicant education and community outreach by City staff during the delay.*

**94. With regard to reviewing changes to and demolitions of buildings without local historic designation, assess ways to spend staff time strategically, engage and empower communities, and create more predictability for property owners and developers.**

*Consider what information and resources are needed to provide greater predictability in decision-making, including internal evaluation standards and additional up-to-date historic resource surveys. Seek to shift the balance of staff time spent on reactive reviews to proactive and creative outreach; education about preservation tools, incentives, and general benefits; and engagement that builds support for historic preservation, including but not limited to historic landmark and historic district applications.*

**95. Allow more time for staff review of permit and historic review applications.**

*Current code allows five business days for staff to determine if a permit can be released administratively or must be referred to the Historic Landmark Commission. Additional time for research will likely increase the number of administratively released permits and help ensure that properties referred to the Commission meet the criteria for landmark designation. Additional time for staff consultation with property owners may yield preservation-oriented solutions without Commission involvement.*

**96. For properties without historic designation, ensure that demolition and partial demolition applications referred for Commission review are for properties that meet the criteria for historic landmark designation or other procedural criteria established by Council.**

*Allow staff to administratively approve changes to properties that are not eligible for landmark designation, including contributing properties in potential historic districts. The Commission will continue to review historic-age buildings dedicated to civic uses, including ecclesiastical, educational,*



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*recreational, charitable, hospital, and other institutional or community uses, regardless of whether the building appears to meet landmark criteria, pursuant to [Resolution 20160623-082](#).*

**97. In consultation with community stakeholders and the Historic Landmark Commission, expand projects eligible for administrative approval.**

*Use the Historic Design Standards to identify areas of general consensus, as well as areas where more clarification in the standards is needed. Together, these measures will provide clearer guidance to property owners and reduce approval time for projects that meet the standards.*

**98. Develop a prerequisite review process to allow the Historic Landmark Commission to hear commercial demolition requests prior to site plan approval.**

*Commercial projects currently require an approved site plan or site plan exemption prior to submission of a demolition permit application. As the site plan approval process requires considerable investment of time and resources, early consultation affords the best opportunity to explore alternatives to demolition.*

## **Protect historic resources**

### Why is this important?

- As stewards of community assets, it's essential that historic property owners understand City processes for review and approval.
- Most property owners do the right thing, but additional checks help make sure everyone is following the rules. Inspections ensure that historic buildings are being maintained, flag unapproved work, and check eligibility for preservation incentives.
- Code violations include work that exceeds the scope of approved permits, work without approval, and demolition by neglect, when someone fails to take care of their property.

### What's happening in Austin now?

City preservation staff inspect historic landmarks' conditions periodically. However, they do not have the capacity or code mandate to visit approved projects during or after construction. Other City inspectors typically do not check for details covered by historic review. This means that projects could depart from approved plans during construction.

Relatively low penalty fees are not an effective deterrent to code violations. When a violation does occur, historic preservation staff must involve the Development Services Department, Austin Code, the Building and Standards Commission, and/or the City Attorney. In past cases, it has been difficult to pursue enforcement and penalties.

### How can we achieve this goal?

**99. Improve enforcement processes to be clearer and more accessible.**

*Work with community members, contractors, other building professionals, and City departments and commissions to improve and clarify enforcement processes. Proactively provide clear, easily accessible information about how demolition by neglect and permit violations are enforced and remedied.*

**100. Require historic approval to be visibly posted alongside building permits on active job sites at designated and pending historic properties.**

*Raise awareness of historic requirements for a project for contractors, subcontractors, and neighboring community members with visibly posted approval that includes a clear description of*

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*approved components. Update the posted signage with any major changes approved after the initial approval.*

**101. Inspect historic preservation work at strategic points during permitted projects.**

*Conduct inspections that focus on preservation-specific matters. Proactive inspections will help ensure that approved projects are successfully completed; reactive enforcement runs a high risk of historic materials being removed and destroyed without permission.*

**102. Develop a rapid response to violations to ensure minimal historic fabric is destroyed.**

*Once removed and destroyed, historic materials and craftsmanship cannot be replaced. Therefore, unpermitted work and work beyond approved scope should be halted as quickly as possible. Work with Development Services Department staff to develop and implement swift responses to minimize lasting damage.*

**103. Augment penalty fees with non-financial penalties that more effectively deter violations. Clearly communicate potential penalties to property owners and contractors.**

*Consider substantial penalties such as prohibiting building permits for 3-5 years where unpermitted demolition of a historic building has occurred. Focus on building partnerships with property owners and contractors rather than exacting penalties.*

**104. Increase penalties for repeat violators.**

*Increase penalties for informed, intentional violators. In cases where property owners do not have resources to maintain their buildings, leverage the economic hardship provision and provide financial and technical resources to help avoid repeat violations.*

**105. Better enforce violations.**

*Work with Development Services Department, Austin Code, and Law Department staff to ensure that enforcement processes are followed in a timely way. Simultaneously develop a non-punitive solutions process to build capacity and skills that will help avoid future violations.*

## **Implement the plan collaboratively**

### Why is this important?

- Many people care about built and cultural community heritage. Recognizing this, and working with a diverse group of stakeholders, will help to transform plan recommendations into reality.

### What's happening in Austin now?

This draft plan was developed by a community working group with 26 members from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We hope to engage the community broadly in revising, refining, adding, and prioritizing the draft recommendations. Meaningful engagement will position the final plan to be implemented in cooperation with diverse stakeholders.

### How can we achieve this goal?

**106. Engage community members in process improvements, policy changes, and program development.**

*Meaningfully engage a racially, ethnically, geographically, economically, and professionally diverse array of community members in steps to implement the plan. Include people with varied experience levels with historic preservation and City processes. This engagement could include focus groups,*



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*working groups, transparent public processes, and regular communications with stakeholders and the public.*

**107. Create more staff positions in the Historic Preservation Office.**

*Look at cities with comparable workloads, as well as Austin's particular needs. Additional staff are needed to engage the community, identify gaps and priorities, ~~and~~ proactively promote historic designation, and enforce requirements: all critical components of a successful preservation program. Particular to Austin, the city adopted a historic district program relatively late and has had a small staff for decades; proactive outreach is needed to catch up. To date, Austin's limited staff capacity has been consumed by reviewing filed applications. Prioritize outreach to and recruitment of candidates with lived experience in Austin and as members of communities of color.*

**108. Ensure that staff and community members have access to the resources needed to make informed decisions.**

**109. Provide annual progress reports on plan implementation; update the plan within ten years.**

*Require the Historic Landmark Commission to provide an annual report on plan implementation progress. Include a community process to update priority actions and strategies as part of the Commission's annual budget request.*

# Appendix

## Preservation Plan Working Group

The Historic Landmark Commission created the Preservation Plan Working Group to develop this draft preservation plan. Selected from 148 applicants, the 26-person group brought varied and deep experience to inform the plan. It was composed of historic preservation professionals, stakeholders from allied fields, and community representatives. Working group members live in 19 ZIP codes and reflect Austin's racial and ethnic diversity. Members were able to opt into compensation to recognize their time and expertise.

The working group met monthly to discuss key topics and draft recommendations, supported by a professional facilitator and City staff. Together, working group members reviewed background material, provided direction for the plan, and drafted and evaluated recommendations.

### *Members*

Michelle Benavides  
Noel Bridges  
Julia Brookins\*  
Ursula A. Carter  
Mary Jo Galindo\*  
Jerry Garcia  
Hanna Huang\*  
Linda Y. Jackson  
Meghan King\*  
Jolene Kiolbassa  
Kevin Koch  
Kelechi Madubuko  
Brenda Malik  
Alyson McGee  
Leslie Ornelas  
Emily Payne  
Rocio Peña-Martinez\*  
Misaël Ramos\*  
Mary Reed\*  
Lori Renteria  
Gilbert Rivera  
Maria Solis\*  
Erin Waelder  
Brita Wallace\*  
Bob Ward  
Caroline Wright

\*Drafting Committee member

## Working group schedule

### *Essential background and process*

July 29, 2021	Introduction and goals
August 30	Equity workshop
September 23	Decision-making

### *Topics*

October 14	Vision for the plan
	Heritage in Austin
November 18	Tangible heritage
December 9	Intangible heritage
February 10, 2022	Incentives
March 10	Incentives (con't) and processes and fees
April 14	Protection and enforcement
May 12	Outreach, education, and engagement

### *Review draft plan*

June 9	Review compiled recommendations
June 29	Final review and next steps

## Focus groups

Owners of longstanding, iconic small businesses, representatives from neighborhood associations across the city, and cultural and heritage organization staff and board members participated in three focus groups. With 23 members total, these groups provided input on specific issues and feedback on draft recommendations.

### *Cultural & heritage organizations*

Alexandria Anderson, Raasin in the Sun Nonprofit  
Rowena Dasch, Neill-Cochran House Museum  
Maica Jordan, Austin Theatre Alliance  
Daniel Llanes, Dances for the World / For the Love Of It  
Christopher Markley, German Texan Heritage Society  
Charles Peveto, Austin History Center Association, Friends of Wooldridge Square, Preservation Austin  
Dr. Clayton Shorkey, Texas Music Museum

### *Legacy businesses*

Jennifer Attal Allen, El Patio  
Regina Estrada, Joe's Bakery  
William Bridges, Deep Eddy Cabaret; Cisco's Mexican Restaurant, Bakery & Bar; Arlyn Studios; Antone's Nightclub; Lamberts Downtown Barbecue  
Teghan Hahn, Wild About Music  
Jade Place, Hillside Farmacy  
Shannon Sedwick, Esther's Follies Theater, The Tavern at 12th and Lamar, Stars Café

### *Neighborhood associations*

Janet Beinke, Aldridge Place Historic District  
Patricia Calhoun, Rogers Washington Holy Cross Neighborhood Association

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Dianna Dean, E. MLK Neighborhood Plan Contact Team  
Carol M. Cespedes, South Windmill Run Neighborhood Association  
Jane Hayman, Pemberton Heights Neighborhood Association  
Jeff Jack, Zilker Neighborhood Association / past president of Austin Neighborhoods Council  
Melanie Martinez, South River City Citizens' Historic Preservation Committee / Travis Heights-Fairview  
Park Historic District Team  
Caroline Reynolds, Allandale Neighborhood Association  
Ted Siff, Old Austin Neighborhood Association  
Ricardo Zavala, Dove Springs Proud

## Technical Advisory Group

A Technical Advisory Group composed of staff from 12 City departments offered targeted advice and expertise.

### *Members*

Austin Code	Marlaya Wright
Austin Energy	Heidi Kasper
Austin History Center	Marina Islas, Ayshea Khan
Development Services	Chris Sapuppo
Economic Development	
Heritage Tourism	Melissa Alvarado, Sehila Casper
Redevelopment	Christine Maguire
Small Business	Nicole Klepadlo
Equity Office	Amanda Jasso
Housing & Planning	
Communications	Alyssa Lane
Demography	Lila Valencia
Housing	Dawn Perkins
Inclusive Planning	Laura Keating, Tymon Khamsi, Shanisha Johnson
Urban Design	Aaron Jenkins
Zoning	Wendy Rhoades
Law	Mary Marrero
Office of Sustainability	Marc Coudert
Parks and Recreation	
Historic Preservation	Ellen Colfax, Kim McKnight
Equity and Inclusion	Sona Shah
African American	TJ Owens
Cultural Heritage	
Facility	
Carver Museum	<i>pending</i>
Mexican American	Michelle Rojas
Cultural Center	
Transportation	Cole Kitten
Watershed Protection	Janna Renfro

## Drafting the recommendations

At each meeting, the Preservation Plan Working Group provided direction on various topics to a 9-member Drafting Committee of working group members. The committee drafted recommendations, which were reviewed by the Preservation Plan Committee of the Historic Landmark Commission, the Technical Advisory Group of City staff, and leadership of the Housing & Planning Department, as well as focus groups when relevant.

The working group received compiled feedback from all groups for discussion and revisions, with the Drafting Committee subsequently revising draft recommendations. The working group considered the full set of recommendations at the end of the drafting process.



## Initial outreach

Staff reached out to the following groups and organizations to advertise the Preservation Plan Working Group application and community heritage survey. Many were also engaged for the focus groups opportunity.

### *Community groups*

AURA  
Austin NAACP  
Central Texas Collective for Racial Equity  
Las Comadres  
LULAC District XII  
PODER  
Save Austin's Cemeteries  
Tejano Genealogy Society  
W. H. Passon Society

### *Nonprofits*

Austin History Center Association  
Austin Justice Coalition

Austin Revitalization Authority  
Blackland Community Development Corporation  
Blackshear Community Development Corporation  
Clarksville Community Development Corporation  
Community Action Network (CAN)  
Community Powered Workshop  
E4 Youth  
Forklift Danceworks  
Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation  
House museums—various, including Neill-Cochran House Museum

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Leadership Austin

Museums—various, including the French Legation and Mexic-Arte Museum  
Six Square  
Tejano Trails

*Professional organizations and coalitions*

AIA Austin  
APA Texas  
Austin Bar Association  
Austin Board of Realtors (ABOR)  
Austin Housing Coalition  
Austin Infill Coalition  
Austin Lodging Association  
CNU Central Texas  
DECA - Digital Empowerment Community of Austin  
Real Estate Council of Austin (RECA)  
Society of Architectural Historians - Southeast Chapter (SESAH)  
Texas Archeological Society  
Texas ASLA  
Texas Society of Architects  
ULI Austin

*Business organizations*

Austin Economic Development Corporation  
Austin Independent Business Alliance / IBIZ districts  
Austin LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce  
Downtown Austin Alliance  
Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce  
Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce  
Red River Cultural District  
Pecan Street Festival  
Visit Austin

*Educational institutions*

Austin Community College  
Austin Independent School District  
Huston-Tillotson University  
St. Edward's University  
University of Texas at Austin: Community Engagement Center, Historic Preservation program, Planning program

*Preservation commissions and organizations*

Travis County Historical Commission  
Texas Historical Commission  
Preservation Austin  
Preservation Texas  
DoCoMoMo  
Midtexmod

*Community members*

Historic landmark owners  
Historic district contacts  
National Register district contacts  
Neighborhood associations and other registered community organizations  
Heritage Grant recipients  
People involved with previous Historic Preservation Office projects (Translating Community History, Design Standards Working Group)

*Legacy businesses*

Lists obtained from news articles and Economic Development Department lists

*Other*

ATX Barrio Archive  
Building Bridges  
Equity Action Team

*City boards and commissions*

African American Resource Advisory Commission  
Asian American Quality of Life Advisory Commission  
Community Development Commission  
Design Commission  
Downtown Commission  
Hispanic/Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission  
Historic Landmark Commission  
LGBTQIA+ Resource Advisory Commission  
Planning Commission  
Tourism Commission  
Zoning and Platting Commission



*City departments and facilities*

Austin History Center  
Austin Public Library  
Development Services Department  
Economic Development Department  
Equity Office  
Housing and Planning Department

Innovation Office  
Law Department  
Parks and Recreation Department  
Office of Sustainability  
African American Cultural and Heritage Facility  
Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural  
Center

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