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## **Local Historic Districts in Austin:**

### **How to Improve the Process**

## Late Backup

#### Why improve the process?

- The current process is a shambles
- If the city wants to avoid a repeat of the events in Hyde Park, the process must be improved
- City Can avoid future litigation and petitions to undo LHDs; Less work for you in the future if you can get it right this time around
- Make your constituents happy!

#### First things first:

- The design standards before the Council today are much improved compared to those at the last public hearing
- Thanks especially to Dr. Lorre Weidlich for her earnest willingness to accommodate all sides on this issue and to help reconcile opposing points of view

#### Improving the Process Part 1:

- Do not treat contributing structures in LHDs the same as bone fide historic landmarks
- PLEASE revise ordinances 25-11 and 25-2 to exclude contributing structures
- Lisa Harris: Make implementation of Hyde Park LHD contingent on revision of 25-11 and 25-2?

### Improving the Process Part 2:

- EITHER have city staff work with petitioners to craft a *final* set of design standards before petition signatures are collected...
- OR seek property owner approval *after* the final revision of the design standards is created
- Current process: Property owners signed petition supporting the LHD based on a set of design standards that are fundamentally different from those before the Council today

### Improving the Process Part 2:

- For the current LHD process, you would generate a lot of goodwill and faith in the process if you directed city staff to mail a copy of the current draft of the design standards to all property owners
- You could also follow Houston's example and ask property owners whether they still support the LHD
- I believe you are likely to get *more* buy-in now that the standards have been improved

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### Improving the Process Part 3:

- INFORM property owners within a proposed LHD that their structure is either contributing or non-contributing
- Give property owners a means to appeal either categorization

### Improving the Process Part 4:

- Not all potentially contributing structures are created equal
- Mandate different levels of protection for structures based on significance
- Current proposal treats unadorned 1950s ranch houses the same as Victorian mansions

### Improving the Process Part 5:

- Treat all property owners who inform Mr. Sadowsky or Mr. Rusthoven in writing that they are NOT in favor of an LHD the same as signatories of a petition of non-support
- If more than 20% of property owners oppose the LHD, require a Council supermajority for approval
- Do not have city staff who are advocating for an LHD also be responsible for certifying a petition of non-support

### Improving the Process Part 7:

- Not all property owners have the same stake in the creation of an LHD
- For example, owners of parking lots should not be given an equal voice in dictating how a homeowner can or cannot remodel his/her home in the LHD
- City should not pledge the support of city-owned properties for an LHD – this increases the possibility of an LHD passing without majority support of homeowners

### Improving the Process Part 6:

- If an LHD is going to require certificates of appropriateness from the Historic Landmark Commission for additional home improvements (e.g., replacing windows), then you should waive the fee for improvements that will cost less than 10% of the appraised value of the home.
- This is only fair if you are going to place an additional burden on homeowners, who vary considerably in the financial means

### Improving the Process Part 8:

- Be humane! Remember that for most of us, our home is also our biggest financial investment. Homeowners should have wide latitude in deciding how to remodel their home to suit their personal needs.
- At some level, LHDs are about one group of neighbors imposing their personal aesthetic points of view on other neighbors. When (1) the aesthetic point of view of a homeowner and (2) the aesthetic point of view of his/her neighbor are in conflict, give deference to individual homeowner choice.