

Strategic Historic Preservation Plan

Implementation Report — September 2010



In 2009, the City of San Antonio initiated a public planning process to develop a Strategic Historic Preservation Plan (SHPP). The purpose of the SHPP is to create a long-term vision and a set of practical and achievable strategies for improving the City's historic preservation program while building a more broad-based historic preservation ethic within the San Antonio community at-large. The Plan also seeks to build on past successes by acknowledging what roles historic preservation will play going forward in shaping the city's urban form and character, in contributing to the city's overall economic development, and in sustaining a high quality of life for all San Antonio residents, businesses, and visitors.

The SHPP brings together in one place, the many and diverse initiatives, programs, needs, opportunities, goals, and principles related to the preservation of San Antonio. The Plan is used as a work program to change and streamline current historic preservation efforts, as well as a guideline for future planning and development efforts. The plan reflects input from a broad range of partners, not only traditional preservation advocates but business interests and development advocates as well. Good preservation and development go hand in hand; one supports the other. The plan recognizes this and outlines strategies to foster both in ways that benefit the whole.

The implementation of the Strategic Historic Preservation Plan requires strong and effective partnerships. In the first year since adoption of the SHPP, the Office of Historic Preservation has established an Internal Implementation Working Group among City staff as well as an External Implementation Task Force to set priorities among the various recommendations in the Plan. Many of the organizational members of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee are serving on the Implementation Task Force. Those groups include American Institute of Architects (AIA), American Planning Association (APA), Bexar County Historical Commission, Central Texas-Balcones Chapter of US Green Building Council, Dignowity Hill Neighborhood Association, Downtown Alliance, Government Hill Alliance, Greater San Antonio Builders Association, Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, Historic and Design Review Commission (HDRC), King William Association, Lavaca Neighborhood Association, Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Monte Vista Historical Association, Monticello Park, Olmos Park Terrace, Paseo Del Rio, Professional Engineers in Private Practice, Real Estate Council, San Antonio Conservation Society, Southern Texas Archaeological Association, Tobin Hill Community Association, Urban Land Institute (ULI), VIA Metropolitan Transit, and Westside Development Corporation.

The SHPP includes recommendations in six categories: Planning, Zoning, Economic Development, Historic Resources, Incentives, and Education and Advocacy. The Plan provides concrete strategies with short, mid, and long-term outcomes to improve preservation programs over the next 5 to 15 years. Many of the recommendations in the SHPP have been implemented in the first year since adoption. The following information will highlight the major recommendations, priorities, and first-year accomplishments in each of the six categories.



Guided running tour of Downtown

Planning Strategies

Incorporating historic preservation elements, such as resource surveys and historic district designations, into neighborhood and district plans should be ongoing activities to ensure that historic resources are identified and reinvestment in them encouraged. Specific strategies include:



Kid's "Amazing Preservation Race" in King William

- Create one set of goals and objectives that become the City's official vision and policies for historic preservation.
- Incorporate historic preservation elements in all citywide, district, and neighborhood planning initiatives.
- Promote preservation as a "green" and sustainable planning and development approach.
- Plan for the future of key historic areas of the City.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- In February 2010, City Council adopted a resolution incorporating the SHPP into the City's overall Comprehensive Plan.
- The City's Mission Verde policy includes the recognition and promotion of historic preservation and reinvestment in existing neighborhoods as a critical element of a truly sustainable city.
- The Office of Historic Preservation and the HDRC initiated a public, proactive designation process for historic resources in River North.

Zoning Strategies

Specific recommendations are made to improve the organization, readability, and overall effectiveness of the historic preservation provisions found within the City's Unified Development Code (UDC). Other city zoning strategies focus on design guidelines and promoting more appropriate development in and around local historic districts and other important areas such as the Missions National Historical Park. Specific strategies include:

- Revise and consolidate all related rules and regulations within the Unified Development Code to improve the effectiveness of the Office of Historic Preservation and Historic Design Review Commission, and the Code's overall readability.
- Consolidate and create standard design guidelines to facilitate Office of Historic Preservation and Historic Design Review Commission reviews of public and private development initiatives and activities.
- Ensure zoning in neighborhoods and commercial districts promotes the preservation and reuse of historic resources.
- Consider form-based zoning within and nearby local historic districts.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- On June 24, 2010, City Council adopted amendments to the UDC to enhance the overall historic preservation program. These amendments include expanding the rehabilitation tax incentive, amending the process for the creation of local historic districts, creating a permit fee for the demolition of landmarks and contributing buildings, strengthening segments of the River Improvement Overlay regulations, and clarifying the criteria for designation as a historic landmark. The amendments also eliminated the two landmark designations and replaced them with one historic landmark designation. All of the substantive amendments adopted by Council were recommended in the SHPP.

Economic Development Strategies

Historic preservation should receive an equal or comparable consideration in all City-driven economic development initiatives. Furthermore, implementing historic preservation-based economic development initiatives should be a high priority for revitalizing the City's inner-core neighborhoods and commercial districts.

- Increase public awareness that historic preservation contributes to the City's economic development.
- Consider preservation actions as integral components of existing and potential business district and neighborhood revitalization programs.
- Create new preservation initiatives that facilitate rehabilitation and reuse of historic resources, revitalization of neighborhoods and commercial districts, and creation of new jobs and small businesses.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- OHP began working with International and Economic Development Department on an economic benefit analysis for historic preservation.
- The Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Downtown Operations, and OHP created a working group to develop strategies for enhancing heritage tourism initiatives and OHP staff submitted a grant application for a heritage tourism wayfinding signage package.

Historic Resources Strategies

Understanding which existing resource inventories need updating and what new areas of San Antonio should be inventoried are important priorities for the City and the Office of Historic Preservation. Identifying endangered and distressed properties that need intervention should be a strong priority. Making survey information available online and published documents for public access should also be high priorities.

Specific strategies include:

- Update existing surveys and conduct new inventories of historic resources throughout the City.
- Use the new information to designate additional districts and target public and private resources.
- Use the new information to create an "early warning" system to increase awareness and action regarding endangered sites, buildings, landscapes, and viewsheds.
- Make surveys more accessible to the public to promote a greater understanding of significant historic resources.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- The OHP continues to conduct training for volunteer survey teams, lead surveys of new neighborhoods, and update existing surveys. Examples include Oak Hills, River North, and various neighborhoods on the city's westside.
- In 2009, OHP launched a proactive designation initiative based on the survey. The initiative started with River North because of the City's other planning initiatives taking place at the same time.
- OHP and ITSD created a survey database that will be made accessible to the public through the City's website. OHP has digitized the survey information for over 5,000 properties in the first year.
- OHP and Code Compliance are testing and enhancing an "early warning system" to identify endangered historic properties *before* they become threatened with eminent demolition.



Hays Street Bridge



Mayor Julian Castro and HPO Shanon Peterson Wasielewski participating in the *This Place Matters* photo contest as part of Preservation Month

Incentives Strategies

Incentives play an important role in encouraging the rehabilitation and reuse of historic resources. Existing incentive programs should be enhanced and new ones created to address specific preservation issues such as endangered properties or to facilitate the adaptive use of “white elephant” buildings. Specific strategies include:

- Enhance the effectiveness of existing historic preservation incentives and create additional programs that encourage reinvestment in historic resources.
- Streamline and expand promotion of preservation programs and incentives to property owners, builders, developers, and investors.
- Determine and remove disincentives and obstacles to preserving and reusing historic resources.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- In June 2010, City Council enhanced the local tax incentive for rehabilitation by allowing the exemption to apply to the property for the full ten years regardless of ownership thereby providing a true incentive for the rehabilitation of the property itself and encouraging additional investment in central city historic neighborhoods.
- OHP established a revolving fund for owner-occupied rehabilitation low-interest loans and a revolving fund for the acquisition, rehabilitation and resale of historic properties in order to combat deterioration in the central city.
- OHP is collaborating with Center City Development Office and others regarding strategic redevelopment and infill opportunities utilizing historic buildings and in historic neighborhoods.

Education and Advocacy Strategies

Promoting the importance of historic preservation in safeguarding the City’s unique heritage and in revitalizing neighborhoods should be ongoing activities. Implementing a comprehensive program of education and advocacy initiatives can also be opportunities to forge critical partnerships with other non-profit groups and civic organizations.

- Undertake a comprehensive outreach effort to increase awareness of the benefits of historic preservation.
- Harness public and private resources to market the numerous incentives and programs available to property owners, builders, and developers.

Key Accomplishments in Year One

- OHP worked with partners and sponsors to host a number of activities for Preservation Month in May. Activities include a “State of Historic Preservation” press event, a children's event, three architectural running tours, the *This Place Matters* photo contest, and many others.
- On August 28, 2010, OHP hosted the second annual Historic Homeowner Fair and published a free Historic Homeowner Handbook that first released to attendees at the Fair. The handbook will also be used throughout the year as a free resource to historic homeowners and HDRC applicants. Over 400 people attended the Fair with 12 educational sessions, kids activities, vendors and hands-on demonstrations.
- OHP launched a new website, maintains a presence on Facebook and Twitter, and hosts regular preservation networking events.
- OHP hosted continuing education training classes for realtors and hands-on window rehabilitation workshops.
- OHP partnered with the UTSA College of Architecture to create a design assistance program for applicants to the HDRC who need technical design or application assistance.

The full text of the SHPP and an Implementation Matrix that includes all of the plan recommendations along with a current status are available on the Office of Historic Preservation website at www.sanantonio.gov/