

1. Using the Historic Design Guidelines

City of San Antonio Historic Design Guidelines
Office of Historic Preservation



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Using the Historic Design Guidelines

The City of San Antonio Historic Design Guidelines (“Historic Design Guidelines”) establish baseline guidelines for historic preservation and design. The Historic Design Guidelines apply to all **exterior** modifications for properties that are individually designated landmarks or within a locally designated historic district. All applicants are encouraged to review the Historic Design Guidelines early in their project to facilitate an efficient review process. In addition to compliance with the Unified Development Code (“UDC”), applicants must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (“COA”) from the Office of Historic Preservation (“OHP”) for all proposed exterior modifications as described in the Using the Historic Design Guidelines section of the Historic Design Guidelines. The Historic Design Guidelines are comprised of eight sections as follows:

- **1. Using the Historic Design Guidelines**
- 2. Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance and Alterations
- 3. Guidelines for Additions
- 4. Guidelines for New Construction
- 5. Guidelines for Site Elements
- 6. Guidelines for Signage
- 7. A Guide to San Antonio’s Historic Resources
- 8. Glossary

The Historic Design Guidelines as a whole are intended to work congruently with other sections, divisions and articles of the UDC but have been separated into individual sections for ease of use. In the event of a conflict between other sections or articles of the UDC and these Historic District Guidelines, the Historic District Guidelines shall control except in the case of signage where the more strict regulation or guideline shall control. Additionally, if an exception from the application of Chapter 28 of the city code of San Antonio has been approved for signage in historic districts, such exception shall remain unless removed by official action of the city council. The meaning of any and all words, terms or phrases in the Historic District Guidelines shall be construed in accordance with the definitions provided in Appendix A of the UDC. In the case of a conflict regarding a definition as provided in these guidelines and Appendix A of the UDC, the Historic District Guidelines definition shall control. All images courtesy of the City of San Antonio, Clarion Associates, and Hardy, Heck, Moore, Inc. unless otherwise noted.

For questions and guidance please contact the Office of Historic Preservation: Email: ohp@sanantonio.gov | Phone: 210.215.9274

Why Preserve?

A message from Historic Preservation Officer, Shanon Shea Miller

We strive to preserve San Antonio's historic buildings and neighborhoods for many reasons. We recognize and celebrate the cultural, aesthetic, environmental and economic value historic preservation brings to San Antonio. It is by definition sustainable and is a proven economic development tool. No example in this country of successful central city revitalization has occurred without preservation as a component.



- Preserving our built environment helps tell the **story** of San Antonio's long, rich and diverse history. Taking care of our older buildings and neighborhoods provides a sense of belonging, a collective memory, and a sense of pride in our past. Preservation is about understanding that historic buildings are limited resources and we must be careful to preserve those that tell our many and varied stories. This includes not just major historic sites but neighborhood schools and parks, streets lined with bungalows, theaters, small-scale commercial buildings, shot gun houses, gas stations, and towering downtown landmarks.
- Preservation helps build strong **neighborhoods** by protecting their character. Preservation programs foster community pride, appreciation of history, learning, creativity, and a sense of place, thus making historic neighborhoods desirable places to live and work.



- Preservation is good for the **economy**. Reinvesting in our historic buildings and neighborhoods helps to stabilize our property values and community, and promotes tourism and economic development. Historic preservation is more labor-intensive than new construction and generally utilizes more local materials. Every time a building is rehabilitated or reused, specialized trades and skilled laborers are employed. This creates jobs and puts more money into our local economy.

- Additionally, historic preservation contributes to the **tourism** industry in our city. Studies have shown that the heritage visitor stays longer and spends more than any other category of visitor. These people are looking for the jewels that locals cherish...often it's our historic buildings and neighborhoods that provide that sense of place and community that attracts visitors, while contributing to the quality of life for local citizens. As Donovan Rypkema says, "Place is not a synonym for location. Place is a location that has been claimed by feelings." For that and many other reasons, historic preservation is good for the local economy!

- Preservation helps protect the **environment**. Reusing and adapting historic buildings and neighborhoods reduces our consumption of raw land, new materials, and other resources. Rehabilitating existing buildings and maintaining existing materials are sustainable solutions and are most often more cost effective over the life of the building than replacement or new construction. Fortunately the green movement is recognizing that the greenest building ever built is the one that already exists! Stewardship of the built environment is sustainability as well as preservation.



We want our neighborhoods and commercial districts to continue to tell the story of San Antonio's history to those who come after us. This can best be done by preserving the condition of our historic resources and giving them new life and new purpose by making them our homes and places of business. The Historic Design Guidelines are intended to serve the community as we work together to preserve San Antonio's historic resources to provide a quality environment for future generation ***Preservation is not about longing for the past or resisting progress. It's about building on the past toward the future.***

Sharon

"Historic preservation has become a fundamental tool for strengthening American communities. It has proven to be an effective tool for a wide range of public goals including small business incubation, affordable housing, sustainable development, neighborhood stabilization, center city revitalization, job creation, promotion of the arts and culture, small town renewal, heritage tourism, economic development, and others."

- Donovan Rypkema, *Measuring Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation*, 2011



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1. Using the Historic Design Guidelines

Purpose

The Historic Design Guidelines are intended to:

- Provide clear direction on fundamental preservation and urban design principles while allowing for more creativity in the details of additions and new construction;
- Provide increased clarity for residents, property owners, design professionals, and potential construction applicants;
- Provide more predictability in the interpretation and implementation of the UDC and in the review process;
- Provide graphics and photographic examples to help ensure consistent administration and to illustrate a range of possible approaches, both good and not so good; and
- Provide a foundation for the development of district-specific guidelines to address issues and variations that are unique to San Antonio's individual local historic districts.

The Historic Design Guidelines are not intended as a substitute for consultation with qualified architects, contractors, attorneys, City staff, and/or the HDRC.

Organization

The Historic Design Guidelines are organized as a series of documents that users may download and print only those sections applicable to their specific project. The sections include the following:

- Using the Historic Design Guidelines
- (a) Guidelines for Exterior Maintenance and Alterations
- (b) Guidelines for Additions
- (c) Guidelines for New Construction
- (d) Guidelines for Site Elements
- (e) Guidelines for Signage
- A Guide to San Antonio's Historic Resources
- Glossary

The History of the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Program

On August 10, 1967, City Council passed and approved an ordinance that created the Board of Review for historic districts. The ordinance also set forth the rules and guidelines for creating historic districts, regulations for exterior changes to historic structures and sites, and the process concerning applications for permits. Soon thereafter, in May 1968, the City created the first local historic district, King William, and appointed the first Board of Review members. The Board advised the Director of Housing and Inspections concerning all applications for permits within the Historic District.

Today the board is known as the Historic Design and Review Commission ("HDRC") and consists of 11 members. The HDRC now hears cases from 27 historic districts, six River Improvement Overlay districts, over 2000 individually designated landmarks, and public projects. The OHP administers the preservation program and is charged with preserving and protecting local historic landmarks, archaeological sites, and design features of San Antonio.

Applicability

The Historic Design Guidelines apply to all **exterior** modifications to buildings and sites that are:

- Individually designated landmarks (zoned with an HE, HS, or HL); and/or
- Within a locally designated historic district (zoned with an H).

The specific applicability of each set of guidelines (Sections 2 – 6) is noted in each section. Each section contains numerous pictures, illustrations, drawings, and examples of projects that have successfully met, or failed to meet, the qualities that the guidelines address. Examples are provided only to illustrate and show context. They shall not be construed as the only possible design solutions allowed.

District-Specific Standards

With the Historic Design Guidelines in place, individual historic districts may consult with City staff to determine whether additional district-specific design tools may be necessary to supplement the citywide guidelines. City staff may assist individual districts in drafting district-specific guidelines prior to City Council action to ensure that no conflicts exist between district-specific guidelines and the citywide provisions.

District-specific guidelines will not conflict with the citywide guidelines; rather they will address more specific items such as color palette, construction materials, and landscaping elements.

Property Classifications (Contributing versus Non-Contributing)

Today, many communities around the country classify properties within historic districts as “contributing” or “non-contributing,” and the latter often are granted exemptions or more flexibility from the design standards. (See typical explanations of these terms in the box at right.)

However, San Antonio’s local historic districts were established many years ago and most do not have a contributing/non-contributing distinction. The San Antonio Historic Resources Inventory is underway (see the following page), and ultimately will help to distinguish contributing versus non-contributing historic properties in new and existing historic districts.

Until that work is completed, for purposes of the historic design review process, all properties within a historic district are subject to these citywide Historic Design Guidelines. The HDRC and the OHP take into consideration a property’s age and historic integrity in evaluating the appropriateness of all development applications.

Pursuant to UDC Section 35-619 (Non-contributing Structures), an applicant may request a determination of whether an object, building, structure or site is contributing or non-contributing to a historic landmark or historic district. Such request must be made on an application obtained from the OHP. The Historic Preservation Officer (“HPO”) will make a determination whether the subject of the application is contributing or non-contributing within 30 days of deeming the application complete, or forward the request to the HDRC within 30 days.

Contributing versus Non-Contributing Properties

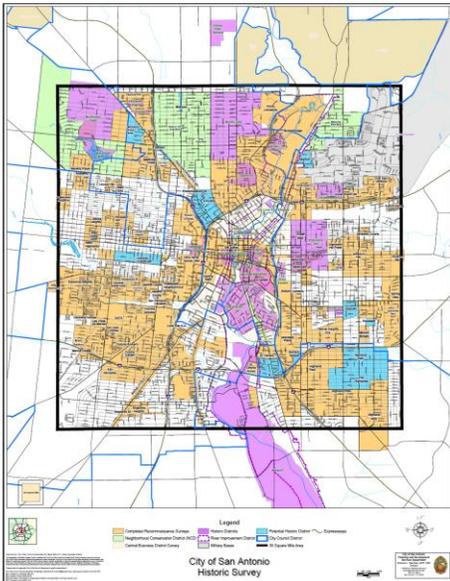


Contributing Properties

Generally, a contributing property is determined to be historically significant and contributes to the character of the historic district. It was present during the period of significance of the district, and possesses sufficient integrity to convey its history, or is capable of yielding important information about that period. While there may have been alterations from the original design, the major character-defining features remain and the building retains much of its original fabric. Other contributing properties may not have been built during the period of significance of the district, but may have gained historic significance in their own right, or are associated with important people or events. All properties are assumed to be contributing unless determined to be non-contributing through the City’s Historic Resources Survey project.

Non-Contributing Properties

Generally, a non-contributing structure is determined to not be historically significant and its removal would not negatively impact the historic district. A historic structure may be determined to be non-contributing because major character-defining features have been altered so significantly that the original and/or historic form, materials, and details are indistinguishable and alterations are irreversible.



Historic Resources Survey

In 2002, the OHP, in conjunction with the San Antonio Conservation Society, initiated a survey to comprehensively identify the City's historic resources. The survey area covers the original city limits as defined in 1856 and encompasses a land area of 36 square miles with an estimated 62,000 resources. The boundaries of the 36 square miles are roughly Hildebrand Avenue to the north, Rio Grande to the east, Division and Morrill Avenues to the south, and 24th and 19th Streets to the west. The boundaries contain residences, commercial and industrial structures, and more than 20 major commercial corridors.

The purpose of the survey is to proactively identify historically significant properties and areas to preserve the architectural and cultural heritage of San Antonio and assist in preventing the demolition of previously non-inventoried historic resources. Identification and documentation of the City's historic resources assists in maintaining the cultural and historical character that makes San Antonio unique. It provides a basis for economic development, serves as an education tool for residents of the community, and creates a comprehensive "snapshot" of the City's historic resources.

Through the participation of over 120 volunteers, all buildings, structures, and objects currently inventoried have been photo-documented and recorded on survey inventory forms. Information about architectural style, year constructed, exterior materials, and alterations has been documented. Each resource has then been reviewed for its architectural integrity and/or cultural significance and has been assigned an integrity value of High, Medium, or Low:

- **High**—Retains all or most of the original features of its design and is a high style, outstanding, unique, or good representative example of architecture, engineering, or craftsmanship. Contributes significantly to local history or broader historical pattern.
- **Medium**—The resource is a good representative example of a local building form or architectural style and retains a significant portion of its original materials and design elements. Contributes to the local history or broader historical pattern of the area or neighborhood.
- **Low**—The resource is a plain or very simple example of an architectural style or has had many alterations or additions thereby removing historic material or design elements. The building detracts from the overall historic and scenic quality of the streetscape.

The survey identifies buildings and districts that are eligible for historic designation. A goal for the Office of Historic Preservation is to complete a database of all inventoried properties and to make this information available to the public. To date, approximately 50% of the survey area, or over 30,000 properties, have been inventoried. The survey is an ongoing project.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

The Historic Design Guidelines complement and are supported by other plans and regulations adopted by the City of San Antonio, including the Strategic Historic Preservation Plan, the UDC, and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Strategic Historic Preservation Plan

In 2009, the City of San Antonio adopted the Strategic Historic Preservation Plan which sets forth 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. The Plan also seeks to build on past successes by acknowledging the role historic preservation plays 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 Plan brings together 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 update and streamline current historic preservation efforts, as well as a guideline for future planning and development efforts. It reflects input from a broad range of partners, not only traditional preservation advocates but business interests and development advocates as well.

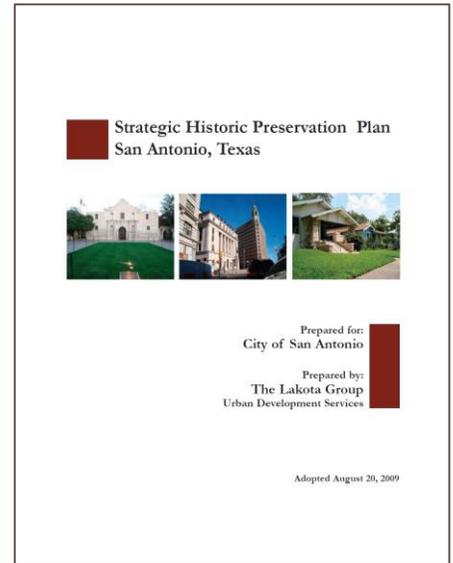
The Plan includes recommendations in six major categories: planning, zoning, economic development, historic resources, incentives, and education/advocacy. The development of citywide historic design guidelines is one of the implementation strategies of the Plan.

Unified Development Code

The UDC regulates land use, zoning, and subdivision development within the City of San Antonio and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. The provisions specific to historic preservation are in Article VI: *Historic Preservation and Urban Design*.

The UDC regulates what uses may be allowed on all properties in the City, including historic properties. Whatever uses are allowed by the zoning for the property are not affected by district or landmark designation. The historic designation allows for the regulation of the appearance of a property rather than its use.

The 2010 amendments to the UDC have increased the type and number of Certificate of Appropriateness applications that can be approved administratively by OHP staff and do not require HDRC review. For a complete list of items that can be administratively approved by staff, refer to Section 35-611 of the UDC.



Treatment Options

When determining how to treat a historic building, feature, or site element, choose your treatment option according to the following hierarchy.



Preservation is the preferred method for treatment; repair rather than replace deteriorated historic features whenever possible.

Rehabilitation is appropriate when elements are deteriorated beyond repair. Replacement elements should match the historic element in size, scale, profile, and finish.

Restoration can be used to reinstate missing elements based on evidence such as photographs or other matching elements that are still intact.

Reconstruction should only be used when none of the other treatment options are available. New construction should be simple in design as to not distract from the historic character of the building or district.

Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties

In considering whether to recommend approval or disapproval of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness, the HDRC and the OHP staff are guided by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (most commonly applicable standards), the UDC, these Historic Design Guidelines, and any additional design guidelines adopted by City Council.

The Secretary’s Standards are reprinted below.

Standards for Preservation

1. A property will be used as it was historically, or be given a new use that maximizes the retention of distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships. Where a treatment and use have not been identified, a property will be protected and, if necessary, stabilized until additional work may be undertaken.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The replacement of intact or repairable historic materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate, and conserve existing historic materials and features will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon close inspection, and properly documented for future research.
4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. The existing condition of historic features will be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of intervention needed. Where the severity of deterioration requires repair or limited replacement of a distinctive feature, the new material will match the old in composition, design, color, and texture.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

Standards for Rehabilitation

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

Standards for Restoration

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use which reflects the property's restoration period.
2. Materials and features from the restoration period will be retained and preserved. The removal of materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize the period will not be undertaken.
3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate, and conserve materials and features from the restoration period will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon close inspection, and properly documented for future research.
4. Materials, features, spaces, and finishes that characterize other historical periods will be documented prior to their alteration or removal.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize the restoration period will be preserved.
6. Deteriorated features from the restoration period will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials.
7. Replacement of missing features from the restoration period will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence. A false sense of history will not be created by adding conjectural features, features from other properties, or by combining features that never existed together historically.

Preservation Approaches



Preservation: The act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of an historic property. Work, including preliminary measures to protect and stabilize the property, generally focuses upon the ongoing maintenance and repair of historic materials and features rather than extensive replacement and new construction. New exterior additions are not within the scope of this treatment; however, the limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a preservation project.

Rehabilitation: The act or process of making possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those portions or features which convey its historical, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration: The act or process of accurately depicting the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared at a particular period of time by means of the removal of features from other periods in its history and reconstruction of missing features from the restoration period. The limited and sensitive upgrading of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems and other code-required work to make properties functional is appropriate within a restoration project.

Reconstruction: The act or process of depicting, by means of new construction, the form, features, and detailing of a non-surviving site, landscape, building, structure, or object for the purpose of replicating its appearance at a specific period of time and in its historic location.

Source: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines

Using the Historic Design Guidelines | Policy and Regulatory Framework



8. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.
9. Archeological resources affected by a project will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
10. Designs that were never executed historically will not be constructed.

Standards for Reconstruction



1. Reconstruction will be used to depict vanished or non-surviving portions of a property when documentary and physical evidence is available to permit accurate reconstruction with minimal conjecture, and such reconstruction is essential to the public understanding of the property.
2. Reconstruction of a landscape, building, structure, or object in its historic location will be preceded by a thorough archeological investigation to identify and evaluate those features and artifacts which are essential to an accurate reconstruction. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.
3. Reconstruction will include measures to preserve any remaining historic materials, features, and spatial relationships.
4. Reconstruction will be based on the accurate duplication of historic features and elements substantiated by documentary or physical evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different features from other historic properties. A reconstructed property will re-create the appearance of the non-surviving historic property in materials, design, color, and texture.
5. A reconstruction will be clearly identified as a contemporary re-creation.
6. Designs that were never executed historically will not be constructed.

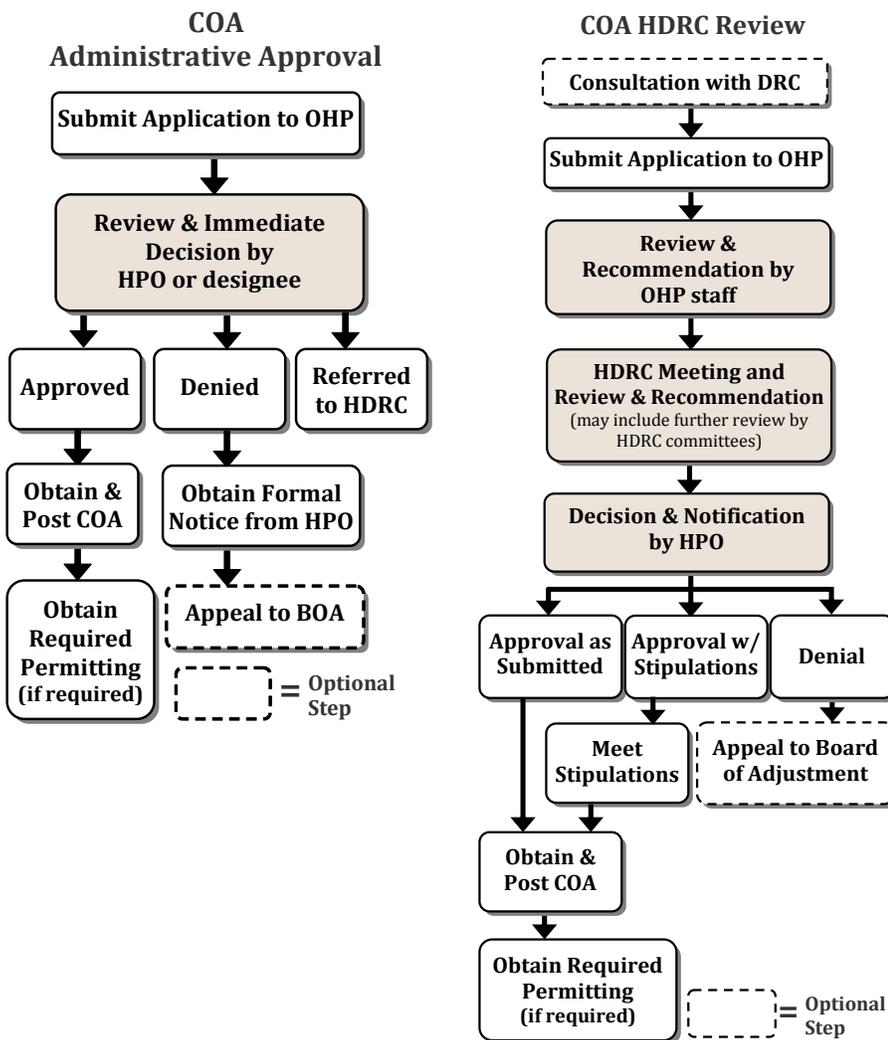


Understanding the Historic and Design Review Process

The historic and design codes from the City’s UDC require that certain actions affecting several types of properties within the city limits must be reviewed and approved, either by the OHP or the HDRC, which meets every first and third Wednesday of each month. For affected properties and actions, the historic and design review process must be completed and written approval obtained from the OHP before actions can be taken or permits can be issued by the Development Services Department or other City departments.

The principal type of written approval for development affecting a historic property is the COA. There are two types of COA approvals: administrative, for relatively minor and straightforward projects, and those requiring HDRC review and approval, for more significant projects. For both types of COAs, decisions are guided by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the City’s UDC.

Both the OHP and the HDRC only review changes to the **exterior** of designated historic buildings. Interior alterations are not reviewable.



Review Bodies

City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation

Led by the City’s HPO, the primary purpose of the OHP is to preserve and protect the unique historic structures and design features of San Antonio. The OHP administers all aspects of the historic preservation program, including reviewing and deciding upon COAs.

Historic and Design Review Commission

The HDRC consists of eleven members who reside in the City of San Antonio and are appointed by the City Council. The responsibilities and duties of the HDRC are to review applications for the designation of local historic districts and local historic landmarks; recommend approval or denial of COAs with respect to proposed exterior alterations to landmarks and properties within local historic districts; maintain a record of all proceedings to be available to the public; and continue to periodically update or cause to be updated the Historic Resource Survey for the City of San Antonio.

Design Review Committee

The DRC is a standing committee of the HDRC that provides informal and non-binding design consultation on an as-requested basis for applicants seeking advice on proposed development projects affecting historic resources. The DRC meets twice monthly and offers a good opportunity for early feedback on how to design projects that will comply with these guidelines—before applicants have invested significant time and money on specific plans.

Board of Adjustment

The BOA hears and decides appeals of administrative decisions; hears and decides special exceptions in those specific instances authorized by the UDC; and authorizes variances in specific cases, subject to evidence of a property-related hardship.

Initial Consultation

Staff Consultation

OHP staff is available during normal business hours to discuss projects and provide initial feedback. Staff may refer applicants to the DRC prior to applying for HDRC review.

Design Review Committee

The DRC is a standing committee of the HDRC that provides informal and non-binding design consultation on an as-requested basis for applicants seeking advice on proposed development projects affecting historic resources. The DRC generally meets twice monthly and offers an opportunity for early feedback on how to design projects that will comply with these guidelines—before applicants have invested significant time and money on specific plans.

Types of HDRC Review

Conceptual

Conceptual review examines general design ideas and principles (such as scale and setback). Specific design details reviewed at this stage are not binding. Rather, a Commission Action is issued that provides the applicant with an assurance to proceed with more detailed design and construction details before coming back for final approval.

Final

Final review is binding and examines all project elements, including specific design details. Final approval looks at a project's compliance with all applicable sections of these citywide Historic Design Guidelines, any applicable district-specific guidelines, the UDC, and the Secretary's Standards.

Certificate of Appropriateness – Administrative Review

Applicability

The Administrative COA is used for certain minor alterations, additions, ordinary repairs, or maintenance as specified in the UDC Ch. 35, Article VI, Sect. 35-611 (as amended June 2010) that may be approved administratively by the OHP without HDRC review.

Administrative COA applications do not require HDRC review and can typically be processed in a few minutes at the OHP reception counter. Provided all other city code requirements are satisfied, building permits can be obtained at 1901 S. Alamo Street immediately after Administrative COAs are approved.

Examples

Examples of projects that may be approved through Administrative COA include:

- Repair using the same materials and design;
- Repainting with the same colors or reasonable changes to paint colors on previously painted surfaces which are consistent with the district or landmark characteristics;
- Re-roofing with the same type and color of material;
- Removal of non-historic windows to replace with windows that match the original windows as closely as possible in material and design;
- Replacing paved areas with sod or other landscaping; and
- Replacing or recreating any fence or handrail with historic documentation.

Certificate of Appropriateness – HDRC Review

Applicability

A COA must be approved by the HDRC for all projects that are subject to HDRC review and may not be approved through an Administrative COA. This includes:

- Exterior changes in materials or designs;
- New construction; and
- Demolitions within historic districts (all properties) except for non-contributing structures made of non-historic materials.

Applicants with complex proposals, or questions about how best to craft a project to comply with these Historic Design Guidelines, are encouraged to submit early materials for early, nonbinding Conceptual Review by the Design Review Committee. (See the box to the left.)

Examples

Examples of items that are typically reviewed using HDRC applications:

- Exterior alteration, restoration, and rehabilitation (including alterations not listed in UDC 35-611);
- New construction, additions, or exterior renovations;
- New exterior signage or changes to existing exterior signage;
- Placement of exterior ornament or accessories; and
- Major modifications.

How Does the HDRC Review Process Work?

Once a completed HDRC application is submitted to the OHP, the following process begins:

- Upon submission to the OHP, a staff member will explain the details of the HDRC meeting.
- The OHP staff reviews the application within approximately three days after the deadline date to determine completeness of the application.
- If staff decides to recommend anything other than approval as submitted, OHP staff collaborates with the applicant to decide whether or not the application will be withdrawn, continued, or revised. Staff has the option to withhold from HDRC consideration any request that appears to be in contradiction with the City's UDC, historic and design codes, or zoning statutes or regulations; that appears to contain factual misrepresentations, errors, or omissions; or for which there appears to be insufficient information to make an informed decision.
- The applicant or a representative, such as the project architect or contractor, must attend the designated HDRC meeting, which occurs every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month at 3:00 at 1901 S. Alamo. The HDRC may recommend approval, denial, a continuance, or send the application to committee.
- If an application is rejected or withdrawn, it becomes inactive until it is resubmitted in an acceptable form.
- If the request is denied, the applicant may submit revised plans that address the reasons for denial or appeal to the Board of Adjustment ("BOA") within 30 days after the receipt of the Commission Action.
- If there are issues or questions about the request that cannot be resolved without a visit to the work site by the HDRC, the request is sent to an HDRC committee. Each committee consists of approximately 3-5 commissioners. The applicant is required to attend the committee meeting and will be notified of the committee meeting date in advance. Such meetings usually occur during the interval between the HDRC meeting at which a request is referred to committee and the next HDRC meeting. Issues are often resolved and requests approved at the next HDRC meeting.
- If the request is approved as submitted, the applicant will receive the approval document (COA) in the mail and a PDF will be e-mailed to the applicant. If needed immediately, a copy can be obtained at the 1901 S. Alamo OHP counter during regular office hours, 7:45 am- 4:30 pm. The certificates are mailed to applicants within 10 days of the HDRC meeting when approval was granted. Provided all other city code requirements and regulations relating to the project are satisfied, building permits for projects that do not require plan checking may be obtained through the Development Services Department immediately after receiving the COA from the OHP.
- For projects that require plan review, permits can be obtained after plan approval.

General Principles for Historic and Design Review

Each section of these Historic Design Guidelines is anchored by a set of general principles that are intended to ensure consistent and fair application of city policy, while taking into account the unique characteristics of each property and historic district as part of the review process. These general principles also are intended to establish a level playing field for all applicants and assist applicants in designing an approach to individual projects that is consistent with the Historic Design Guidelines.

The general principles from each section are reprinted below for ease of reference.



General Principles for Exterior Maintenance and Alterations

Principle #1: Routine Maintenance is Essential for Preservation

With proper maintenance, most historic buildings can last for centuries. Poorly functioning gutters, downspouts, and flashing; standing water at foundations; water splashing onto walls from the surrounding hard surfaces; and water-entrapping vegetation such as vines and shrubs on or near walls and foundations can all contribute to the deterioration of historic structures. Each of these issues can be prevented or corrected through proper maintenance.

Principle #2: Preservation of Features in Place is Preferred Over Replacement

Maintaining and repairing features is preferred over replacing features as to maintain the high-quality materials, character, and embodied energy of historic buildings and to reduce the amount of waste that goes to a landfill. However, if features are deteriorated beyond repair (more than 50%), in-kind replacement using new components that match the original in form, finish, and materials is favored while replacement with comparable substitutes will be considered.

Principle #3: More Flexibility in Treatment and/or Replacement May be Considered in Locations Not Visible from the Public Right-of-Way

Building features not visible from the public right-of-way are less likely to detract from the character of the structure or district. More flexibility in the treatment and/or replacement of features in these locations may be considered if the historic integrity of the structure has already been lost or compromised and/or other unique circumstances exist that warrant consideration of a more flexible approach. However, the OHP will review proposed alterations on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they are appropriate.

General Principles for Additions

Principle 1: Ensure that Historic Buildings Remain the Central Focus of the District

An addition should not damage or obscure architecturally important details and materials of the primary structure or other resources on the site. Additions should be distinguishable from the original structure without distracting from it.

Principle 2: False Historicism/Conjectural History is Discouraged

Design additions to reflect their time while respecting the historic context and architectural style of the original structure. Avoid using architectural details for additions that are more ornate than those found on the original structure or that are not characteristic of the original structure's architectural character.

Principle 3: Contemporary Interpretations of Traditional Designs and Details May be Considered

When applied to a compatible building form, contemporary materials, window moldings, doors, and other architectural details can provide visual interest while helping to convey the fact that the building or addition is new.

Principle 4: More Flexibility in Interpretations of Traditional Designs and Details May be Considered in Locations Not Visible from the Public Right-of-Way

All facades of a building are important; however, the highest level of scrutiny related to compatibility should generally be placed on additions that are visible from public right-of-way.



General Principles for New Construction

Principle #1: Ensure that Historic Buildings Remain the Central Focus of the District

Carefully consider the historic context of the block and surrounding district when designing a new structure. New construction should be distinguishable from historic structures in the district without detracting from them.

Principle #2: False Historicism/Conjectural History is Discouraged

Attempting to create an exact replica of historic styles for new construction blurs the distinction between old and new buildings and makes the architectural evolution of the historic district more difficult to interpret. While new construction within historic districts should not attempt to mirror or replicate historic features, new structures should not be so dissimilar as to distract from or diminish the historic interpretation of the district.

Principle #3: Contemporary Interpretations of Traditional Designs and Details May be Considered

When applied to a compatible building form contemporary materials and architectural details can increase energy efficiency and provide visual interest while helping to convey the fact that the building is new.





General Principles for Site Elements

Principle #1: Respect the Historic Context

New site elements should complement, not detract from, historic site elements, the character of the historic structure they serve, and the surrounding district. When considering specific site elements (e.g., streetscape, topography) the surrounding context is important, since the integrity of various elements varies from block-to-block.

Principle #2: Routine Maintenance is Essential for Preservation

With proper maintenance, many historic site elements can last for centuries. Routine maintenance of walls, sidewalks, monuments, landscaping, curbing, and other decorative and functional site elements is essential to prevent deterioration.

Principle #3: Preservation of Features in Place is Preferred Over Replacement

Maintaining and repairing historic site elements is preferred over replacing those elements as to maintain the character of the public right-of-way and district. However, if elements are deteriorated beyond repair (more than 50%), in-kind replacement using new components that match the original in form and materials is favored while replacement with comparable substitutes will be considered.

Principle #4: More Flexibility in Treatment and/or Replacement May be Considered in Locations Not Visible from the Public Right-of-Way

Site elements that are not visible from the public right-of-way are less likely to detract from views of the historic structure or the overall character of the district. More flexibility in the treatment and/or replacement of site elements located in rear yards and other areas of the site that are partially or wholly concealed from the public right-of-way may be considered.



General Principles for Signage

Principle #1: Respect the Historic Context

New signs should complement, rather than compete with, the character of a historic building and the surrounding district. Not all allowed signage types are appropriate to individual historic districts or landmarks. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to historic context, building forms, and site layout when selecting, designing, and reviewing new signage. New signs should be pedestrian oriented and appropriately designed in terms of size, placement, and materials. Appropriate uses for individual signage types are addressed in this subsection, as applicable.

Principle #2: Encourage a Visually Interesting Streetscape Free of Clutter

Signs have the ability to create a visually pleasing streetscape as well as improve pedestrian and traffic safety; however they can also be distracting if not designed properly. Consider the overall number, type, size, and design of signs used on individual buildings and along the streetscape to ensure new signs respect the historic surroundings and do not result in visual clutter.

Principle #3: Reinforce the Pedestrian-Oriented Nature of Commercial Uses

Signage was historically most prevalent in areas and on buildings that were used for commercial purposes; however, as San Antonio's historic districts evolve over time, the adaptive re-use of individual structure or specific districts will result in the introduction of signage in more areas and on more building types. Regardless of the location or building type, signage should be designed and scaled with pedestrians in mind

Frequently Asked Questions

I'm only planning to make minor improvements; do I still need to go through the HDRC review process?

No, minor projects can usually be approved by OHP staff with an Administrative COA.

How do I make sure that my project will be approved by the HDRC?

Talk to staff early in the process. Provide all required documentation.

Do I need to hire an outside professional to get the HDRC's approval?

Not necessarily, it generally depends on the scope of work. As long as it is not required by law and sufficient documentation can be provided you may not have to hire a professional designer for HDRC or OHP review.

I am planning a complex project. When is the best time to consult with OHP staff?

As soon as possible. Staff is always available to sit down and review proposed projects even when it's just an idea or concept. It may also be helpful to consult with HDRC.

How long does the HDRC review process typically take?

Applications are due 19 days before the desired HDRC meeting date. COAs are issued within 10 days of the meeting date (and often sooner than 10 days).

Is there a way to expedite the HDRC review process?

By having a complete application with all required exhibits and support documentation you can ensure a decision by the HDRC.

What information do I need to submit with my application?

There's a checklist on the application itself.

Can I begin construction immediately after I get the HDRC's approval?

Construction can begin once proper permits are issued with required COA.

How are the Historic Design Guidelines enforced?

The OHP has a full time Historic Building Enforcement Officer that inspects work against issued COAs. Any work that was initiated without a COA will be subject to a Stop Work Order and an associated \$500 HDRC application fee.

Are there any financial incentives available for historic preservation?

There is a Substantial Rehabilitation Tax Incentive. See <http://www.sanantonio.gov/historic/incentives.aspx>.

Who can I contact with questions?

OHP staff at 210.215.9274 or OHP@sanantonio.gov .

